

**The concept of perversity as a means towards a non-humanist
existentialism in the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Friedrich
Nietzsche**

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List of Abbreviations

Sartre

BN *Being and Nothingness*

EH *Existentialism is a humanism*

TE *Transcendence of the Ego*

Heidegger

BT *Being and Time*

LH *Letter on Humanism*

Nietzsche

BG *Beyond Good and Evil*

EcH *Ecce Homo*

D *Daybreak*

HH *Human, All too Human*

GM *On the Genealogy of Morality*

BT *The Birth of Tragedy*

GS *The Gay Science*

TSZ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

UTM *Untimely Meditations*

Abbreviated forms are used after one full reference to the text in each chapter.

Abstract

Existentialism, broadly construed, can be understood in terms of a desire to ‘return to man’. In other words, underpinning existentialist thought is a sense that modern philosophy has lost touch with the essential goal of allowing man to comprehend his own existence. And it is this aim then, of a return to man’s being as it is concretely lived and experienced, that it seeks to realise. However it will be argued in this thesis that, against familiar criticisms of such a project, this ‘return’ does not simply necessitate a return to, or acceptance of, ‘humanism’. For influenced by Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism*, Marxist, structuralist and post-structuralist critics have all suggested this movement is synonymous with a naive or romantic ‘humanist’ idea of the subject. That is, they have suggested that existentialism’s ‘return to man’ amounts at best to the radicalisation of a discredited subject-entity concept.

As such, against this, we will argue that existentialism and its ‘return to man’ is not simply another humanism. And we will attempt to demonstrate this point, and resolve this apparent contradiction, by exploring the idea of perversity in the work of Sartre and Nietzsche. For if man is understood as a ‘perversion’ of something other than himself then it may be possible to have a philosophy of man without appealing to the notion of an isolated subject-entity. How will we do this though? In the first half of the thesis we will look at the way in which for Nietzsche the human can be understood as a perversion of fundamental natural forces. We will attempt this first of all by looking at the genesis of the free spirit as a perversion of man’s normal, fettered state. Secondly we will look at *On The Genealogy of Morality*, and explore how man can be understood there as a ‘perverse animal’; as a perversion of the active force of will-to-power. Continuing, in the second half of the thesis, we will then explore the idea of man as a ‘perversion of being’ that we find in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*. We will see there how man exists, first of all, as a perverse non-being in relation to being. Next though we will look at how this ontological fact implies a secondary perverse attempt by man to conceal this reality from himself. Consequently then by exploring such a ‘perverse’ conception of man we hope to show how a non-humanist existentialism, and ‘return to man’, is possible.

Introduction: *The concept of perversity as a means towards a non-humanist existentialism*

A. The meaning of existentialism

And I say this to the overthrowers of statues: To throw salt into the sea and statues into the mud are perhaps the greatest of follies. The statue lay in the mud of your contempt: but this precisely is its law, that its life and living beauty grow again out of contempt! And now it arises again, with divine features and sorrowfully seductive; and in truth! It will even thank you for overthrowing it, you overthrowers!

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 'Of great events'¹

It is not exaggerating to say that in recent decades the 'statue' of existentialism has very much been thrown into the metaphorical mud. Once dominating the intellectual landscape, along with a Marxism that has suffered a similar fall from grace, what became known as 'existentialism' and its concerns are now widely regarded as philosophically outmoded. Authenticity, angst, alienation, being-for-others?² It would seem many have accepted Levi-Strauss's claim that such talk is '*Metaphysique pour midinette*'.³ And whilst its most recognisable proponent, Sartre, is derided as a 'philosopher of a world that has passed',⁴ its other seminal figures, Nietzsche and Heidegger, have been salvaged only at the price of expunging the 'existentialist' label from their thought altogether. Yet such 'contempt' is not as fatal as it might seem. Rather, following Nietzsche's logic in our quote, we will argue in this thesis that from the 'mud' of such criticism a revitalised and philosophically credible existentialism can be recovered. That is to say, by responding to a particular misconception underpinning these critiques we can separate a genuine existentialism from the ossified image

¹ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* trans. by R.J Hollingdale [London: Penguin, 1961], p154

² See J. Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity* [London: Routledge, 1995], for discussion of the 'death of authenticity' as a concept in light of post-modernism, p203-204: "There is today a grave danger that we are facing the death of authenticity. Post-structuralist thought and the other currently fashionable streams of what is vaguely called 'post-modernism' attempt to dissolve the subjective pathos of authenticity which lies at the heart of existentialist concern."

³ 'Shop girl metaphysics', See K. Morris, *Sartre* [Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008], p54: FN 18 [Quoted in *Moi* 1990: 28]

⁴ N.F. Fox, *The New Sartre* [New York: Continuum, 2003], p1

with which it has become associated. And it is by doing this further that we will be able to recover its true distinctiveness and interest as a philosophy. In short, by doing this we will be able to ask, after Crowell, whether existentialism ‘...might not merely have a history, but also a future?’⁵

[i] Defining existentialism

But what though is the basis of this misconception which will allow us to do this? What lies at the root of those criticisms which have led to existentialism’s dismissal, and which in being countered will help us to recover its true meaning? In order to answer this question we must ask initially what has been meant, and what can be meant, by ‘existentialism’ in the first place. And we begin in this fashion by noting that the very capacity of the term to describe *anything meaningful at all* has often been questioned. As Cooper notes, ‘It has been denied, that is, that there ever was a distinctive philosophical perspective or tendency shared by those thinkers who have been labelled ‘existentialists.’⁶ Yet whilst the term is certainly more problematic than say that of ‘empiricism’ or ‘phenomenology’ it would be an exaggeration to say that such thinkers have nothing meaningful in common.⁷ Indeed, it is the very problematical nature of defining ‘existentialists’ itself that is taken by some as the starting point for a characterisation of the term. For, as Kaufmann argues, ‘Existentialism is not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy.’⁸

In this way, then one possible understanding of existentialism is that it is not so much a ‘philosophy’ in the conventional sense, but a sort of ‘anti-philosophy’. That is, based on a sense that traditional philosophy is incapable of grasping the richness or immediacy of human life, such an understanding says that ‘existentialism defined itself *against* systems.’⁹ In short it suggests that existentialism defined itself against any form of systematic thought. And in

⁵ S. Crowell, ‘Existentialism and its legacy’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. by S. Crowell [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], p4

⁶ D. Cooper, ‘Existentialism as a philosophical movement’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. by S. Crowell [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], p27

⁷ Gabriel Marcel first used the term in 1945 to describe Sartre and De Beauvoir. Nevertheless most of those associated with ‘existentialism’ rejected the label. See R. Schacht, ‘Nietzsche: after the death of God’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. S. Crowell [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], p112-114

⁸ W. Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* [New York: Meridian, 1956], p11

⁹ J. Judaken, ‘Introduction’, in *Situating Existentialism*, ed. by J. Judaken and R. Bernasconi [New York: Columbia University Press, 2012], p1

this way, further, such an interpretation ties existential thinkers to what Solomon calls the ‘existential attitude.’¹⁰ In other words, such understanding ties existentialism to the figure of the ‘existential hero’, such as is given form in Sartre’s Roquentin, and Camus’s Meursault. For it links existentialism to the attitude of figures whose primary goal is not philosophical knowledge. Rather for these figures the goal is an ‘authentic life’ based on confrontation with the true meaninglessness of existence, and resistance to all human endeavours to evade this.¹¹ However such a notion, taken in itself, is of course for our purposes limited. That is to say, whilst this notion of existentialism as an ‘attitude’ doubtless captures something, and is an advance on jettisoning the term altogether, it is hardly the basis for recovering a philosophically credible mode of thought. And it is for this reason then that others, like Cooper, Schacht, Crowell,¹² and Warnock¹³ have in contrast been at pains to argue for existential thought as more of a traditional philosophical ‘position’ or theory.

Cooper, in particular, stands as a good example of this effort to extricate existentialism from this ‘anti-philosophy’ interpretation. As such he composes an ‘existentialist manifesto’,¹⁴ focused on man’s estrangement from the world and his freedom, and suggests this is something to which all existentialists would have subscribed. Similarly, Crowell claims that existentialism can be read ‘from the vantage point of contemporary thought.’¹⁵ For, he argues that it can be understood in terms of its contributions to the problems of analytic philosophy. Yet such efforts to make existentialism philosophically ‘respectable’ in this way, equally pose their own risk. For in ignoring the radical nature of its challenge to conventional philosophy, such notions also risk masking what is distinctive about existentialism. In brief, they risk reducing existentialism to a set of ‘positions’, as if Nietzsche and Sartre merely sought to convince people of a particular set of objective theoretical beliefs. That is, they risk suggesting that existentialism is in principle no different from any other ‘school’ of philosophy.

¹⁰ R. Solomon, *Existentialism* [New York: Random House, 1974], pxi

¹¹ See Golomb, p18-33, for a development of this view, and for a reading of Sartre’s *Nausea* as being concerned with the discovery of authenticity. In a similar vein, Golomb also suggests that Kierkegaard’s ‘seducer’ and Nietzsche’s Zarathustra are also ‘existential heroes’ pursuing authenticity.

¹² See *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*

¹³ See M. Warnock, *Existentialism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970], p1, for the view that existentialist thinkers are defined by ‘the interest in human freedom.’

¹⁴ Cooper, p29-30

¹⁵ Crowell, p5. Note that Kaufmann also suggests that a reconciliation between analytic philosophy and existentialism is possible, p51, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*.

[iii] The 'return to man'

Consequently, this thesis will attempt to avoid the extremes of both the 'anti-philosophical' and the straightforwardly 'theoretical' characterisations of existentialism. Rather, we will attempt a synthesis of the two positions which maintains existentialism as meaningfully philosophical, but also acknowledges its distinctiveness from traditional philosophy. And we will do this by looking at the characterisation of existential thought given by Paul Tillich. For, Tillich argues, existentialist thinkers are '...those who have regarded man's 'immediate experience' as revealing more completely the nature and traits of Reality than man's cognitive experience.'¹⁶ In other words, existentialists are defined by the assumption that experience of concrete, personal 'Existence'¹⁷ has priority over abstract or 'objective' thought in the philosophical enterprise.¹⁸ And this in turn allows for an overcoming of the idea that existentialism is either just an attitude or just a theory. For this position implies that existence, or man's existential experience, and philosophical understanding are not opposites but in fact imply one another. As a consequence then authentic existence is not a static and self-enclosed enterprise but implies philosophical questioning and understanding. And it is for this reason that, as Tillich notes, all the existentialists 'try to "think Existence", to develop its implications, instead of simply living in "Existential" immediate experience.'¹⁹

Conversely though, just as the unity between philosophy and existence implies that an 'anti-philosophical' existentialism is misguided, so to it suggests that a purely 'theoretical' existentialism is not possible either. For if philosophical understanding is gained through sensitivity to one's own concrete existence then one cannot pursue philosophy simply 'objectively'. That is, one cannot, like the scientist, detach one's life and being from one's role as a philosopher. Rather, one's own individual 'life', and the struggle to understand it, must be the ground of his philosophical knowledge. And it is for this reason that, as Tillich says, 'The Existential thinker is the interested or passionate thinker.'²⁰ However, to return, where does all this then leave us in relation to our initial question? In brief, where does this leave us in terms of our attempt to grasp the root of existentialism's demise? The answer lies in the nature of the characterisation of existentialism we have just given. For if

¹⁶ P. Tillich, *Theology of Culture* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1959], p77

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p87

¹⁸ See also Schacht, 'Nietzsche: after the death of God', in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, for discussion of the priority of 'Existenz' in existentialism, p114. Note though that Schacht does not discuss properly how Nietzsche's thought fits in with this idea of 'Existenz'

¹⁹ Tillich, p87

²⁰ *Ibid*, p89

‘existentialism’ can be both maintained as an intelligible philosophy, *and yet* be distinguished from traditional schools of thought, it can only be done so on the basis of a return to existence. Specifically, it can be done so on the basis only of being *a return to man’s existence*. And it is this fact, and the fact that *this* characterisation is susceptible to a certain misinterpretation, which lies behind existentialism’s dismissal. In short, it is for existentialism ‘the belief that the innermost centre of Nature lies in the heart of man’²¹ which has allowed for a misunderstanding and rejection of the existentialist project.

Before, though, we can expand on how this characterisation led to existentialism’s dismissal, it is necessary to say a little more about why exactly this ‘return to man’ distinguishes it. And an apt starting point for this endeavour is Kierkegaard’s criticism of ‘modern philosophy’ in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. For there he attacks such philosophy for ‘having forgotten, in a sort of world-historical absent-mindedness, what it means to be a human being...each one for himself.’²² In other words, what Kierkegaard is criticising is the way in which philosophy has lost touch with the essential goal of allowing man to comprehend his own concrete existence. And this is a point which, whilst directed in that instance at Hegelians, could equally well apply to the major strands of contemporary thought. So, in the case of analytic philosophy, we can say that ‘man’ in any more concrete sense is sidelined. Instead, modelled on science, it concerns itself with the acquisition of knowledge in a series of atomised and abstract fields: epistemology, language, mind, science, psychology, ethics and so forth. And only contingently related to any actual experience, such fields are clearly delineated from the life of the individual man or woman addressing them.²³ Likewise post-structuralist thought has been even more conscious in renouncing ‘man’ as philosophy’s principal concern. Carrying on from the structuralist Levi-Strauss, most of the figures in this tradition²⁴ concur with him in believing ‘....the ultimate goal of the human sciences to be not to constitute, but to dissolve man.’²⁵ And Deleuze is symptomatic of this displacement, when he declares that instead of a concern for man, ‘philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts.’²⁶

²¹ Tillich, p95

²² S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Post-script to the Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. by A. Hannay [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], p100

²³ In fact, a concern with ‘man’ in a broader sense is often seen as linked to the hubris of past ‘continental philosophy.’

²⁴ Namely Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida and Lacan

²⁵ C. Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966], p246

²⁶ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. by H. Tomlinson and G. Burchill [London: Verso, 1994], p2

In contrast then, what distinguishes the thinkers who can be meaningfully described as ‘existentialists’ is a belief that philosophy has lost touch with its true purpose. That is, it has lost touch with existing, living human beings. So importantly, it is on this basis that despite his differences from those more un-problematically associated with the label that Nietzsche too is an existentialist. And this is apparent when he declares, criticising past philosophy, that ‘We must again become *good neighbours to the closest things* and cease from gazing so contemptuously past them at the clouds and monsters of the night.’²⁷ For Nietzsche wants man to escape those structures of thought, religious, moral and metaphysical, which have allowed man to flee himself. That is, in light of the ‘death of God’²⁸, Nietzsche wants man to once more confront honestly the immediacy of his own, all-too-human, world. Similarly it is this ‘existential’ concern and spirit which distinguishes existentialists from other thinkers ostensibly interested in ‘man’. For existentialism’s ‘return to man’ also implies a critique of discourses which ignore man’s actual existence in favour of an abstract and speculative species being.²⁹ Instead their concern is for a recovering of the philosophical significance of man’s immediate ‘world’ as it is experienced, a world that has typically been overlooked. In other words, as Sartre says, existentialists are defined by the fact that they ‘...have immersed man back in the world, they have restored to his anguish and his sufferings, and to his rebellions too, their full weight.’³⁰

²⁷ F. Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human* translated by R.J Hollingdale [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], II: SS16, p309

²⁸ See Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science* translated by J. Nauckhoff [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001], SS108, 125, 343

²⁹ As for instance is found in the humanist philosophy of Feuerbach

³⁰ J-P, Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. by A. Brown [London: Routledge, 2004], p51. Sartre refers specifically here to existential *phenomenologists*, but the same point could be applied to Nietzsche and Kierkegaard also.

B. The problem of humanism

Yet to return to our initial point, what is the misinterpretation to which this project of a 'return to the world of man' is vulnerable? And how is it that this has led to existentialism becoming philosophically discredited? To answer these questions we need in turn to look back to Heidegger, and his *Letter on Humanism*. For it is there that Heidegger encourages the notion that existentialism's return to man represents merely the latest mode of what he calls 'humanism'. Moreover, it is there that Heidegger also enshrines the idea that such humanism necessarily falls short of true philosophical understanding. But if, taken together, these claims then lay the grounds for a dismissal of existentialism on what basis does he justify them? What is wrong with humanism, and why is existentialism identified with it? Taking the former claim first, we can say that Heidegger's argument against 'humanism' is based on the idea that it exists as a certain kind of 'science', in the broadest sense of the term, of the human. In other words, the limitation of humanism derives from the notion implied by the idea of 'the humanities'. That is, its limitation is that it exists as a complement to science, doing for 'the human', what the natural sciences do for the material world. For, 'humanism', like science in relation to the physical, assumes that 'man' is a theoretically isolatable 'field' about which it is possible to conduct a neutral, originary enquiry. And this is what Heidegger refers to when he says that 'philosophy' in the humanist sense 'has been in the constant predicament of having to justify its existence before the 'sciences'...believing '...it can do that most effectively by elevating itself to the rank of a science.'³¹

The problem, however, with such an approach for Heidegger is evident. For in assuming it is possible to have an isolated, originary, enquiry into 'man', humanism already makes a certain ontological assumption about its object. That is, without realising it, humanism makes an assumption about man's place in Being, about 'the relation of Being to the essence of man.'³² And it does so in so far as it positions man as an isolatable object of knowledge. For humanism does not ask whether man stands in a unique relation to Being which cannot be 'known' in this way, or whether man must fundamentally be caught up with being. And it can not do so since this would mean abandoning the idea of 'man' as an isolatable theoretical field. Rather, it presumes by dint of its method that we 'locate man

³¹ M. Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', in *Heidegger: Basic writings*, edited by D.F. Krell [London: Routledge, 1978], p148. See also F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* translated by R.J Hollingdale [London: Penguin, 1973], SS204

³² *LH*, p153

within being as one being among others'³³, a being that, even if possessed of 'unique' qualities, is ontologically equivalent to other beings. And this means as Heidegger had argued in *Being and Time*, that we take man 'as an instance or special case of some genus of entities as things that are present-at-hand.'³⁴ In other words, no matter how un-prejudiced humanism believes its enquiries to be, or however subtle its description, it can never escape the characterisation of man in terms of a 'presence'. That is, no matter how 'different' from other entities man is seen to be, humanism, because of its method, ends up construing him as 'another entity in the world'. In short, it ends up construing him in terms of an '*is*' to which it is possible to ascribe certain properties or attributes like 'subjectivity' or 'reason'.

Thus, to address our previous question, we can say that the problem with humanism in this way is that it fails to, as Heidegger puts it, 'think the essence of man more primordially.'³⁵ In short, it fails to consider how and whether man stands in a different relation to being than that of an entity. As such, we can argue, it does not consider whether man might be ultimately more than a variation on Descartes 'thing that thinks.'³⁶ Yet why is it that Heidegger also, to look at his second claim, considers existentialism's return to man to be the latest mode of such 'humanism'? The answer lies in a reflection on, again considering Descartes, what we might mean by saying man is 'more' than a thinking subject. For as Heidegger makes clear, though

...the essence of man consists in his being more than merely human, if this is represented as 'being a rational creature'. 'More' must not be understood here additively, as if the traditional definition of man were indeed to remain basic, only elaborated by means of an existentiell postscript.³⁷

In other words Heidegger sees the danger of existentialism being that it simply complements or 'adds to' the humanist understanding of man without fundamentally challenging it. That is, its return to man, simply means emphasising a neglected 'existentiell'³⁸ aspect of humanism, or as Crowell puts it 'emphasising the contingent

³³ *LH*, p154

³⁴ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson [Oxford: Blackwell, 1962], SS10, p68

³⁵ *LH*, p168

³⁶ R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by J. Cottingham [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], p19

³⁷ *LH*, p166

³⁸ *Ibid*, p155

psychological and situational factors in *human* life, in contrast to the life of a purely rational agent.³⁹ And in this way, for Heidegger, existentialism fails to get beyond the humanist project. Rather its return to ‘existence’, with its emphasis on ‘immediate experience’ and the *personal* dimension to subjectivity, simply radicalizes or completes that project.

However, we might ask, returning to our central concern, how has this led to a misperception and rejection of existentialism in contemporary thought? How have these arguments in the *Letter on Humanism* set the context for a dismissal of existentialism as a philosophy? The explanation can be traced back to Heidegger’s substantial influence on the French philosophical culture which has dominated recent ‘continental’ thought. For as Rockmore has argued, ‘in the period after the Second World War, Heidegger became the master thinker of French philosophy.’⁴⁰ And in this way it is therefore hardly surprising,⁴¹ given the content of the *Letter*, that existentialism’s reputation was to subsequently come under attack. In particular, Heidegger was interpreted there as ‘decentring the subject’, prophesising ‘the death of man.’⁴² That is, he was interpreted as doing something which influenced figures like Derrida,⁴³ Foucault⁴⁴ and Badiou, and their belief that all concern for ‘man’ had been rendered suspect. And of course, again following Heidegger, existentialism was undeniably seen to be very much just such a philosophy ‘of man’.

Thus, we can say, the context was set for existentialism’s demise. For whether or not Heidegger had in fact intended to dismiss all interest in man as ‘humanist’, the *perception* that he *had*, contributed to a context in which existentialism could be written off on those grounds. That is, existentialism’s ‘return to man’, helped no doubt by Sartre’s lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism*,⁴⁵ and Heidegger’s conflation of the two terms, could be dismissed as the last gasp of humanism. In short, it could be dismissed as clinging onto the notion of an isolated and romantic subject which had now been discredited. And it is for this reason then that, looking back, we get the common, current perception of existentialism as

³⁹ Crowell, p9

⁴⁰ T. Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy* [London: Routledge, 1995], pxi

⁴¹ Combined with other factors, like the desire to topple Sartre as the ‘master thinker’ of French thought, see Rockmore, chapters 4 and 5.

⁴² Rockmore, p181, p136: in relation to Foucault

⁴³ See Rockmore, p142, FN138: for an account of Derrida’s attack on Sartre in ‘Les Fins de l’homme’

⁴⁴ See Rockmore, p58, p136-137] As Rockmore points out, Foucault argues that the conception of the human being is ‘finished’ [FN 129]

⁴⁵ J-P. Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. by C. Macomber [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007]. Sartre intended ‘humanism’ there in a different way from the ontological sense meant by Heidegger in the *Letter*. That is, he intended it in the ‘moral’ sense that for man ‘there is no legislator other than himself.’ [p53]. Nonetheless, combined with the simplification of his thought that necessarily occurred in the attempt to give a generally accessible lecture, the ‘humanist’ label stuck.[p51-53]

philosophically naive and unworthy of genuine attention. It is for this reason, that it is viewed as a humanism, that existentialism has been thrown into the ‘mud’ of contemporary contempt.

C. ‘Perversity’ as a means toward a non-humanist existentialism

[i] The problem: non-humanist existentialism

Yet if we have in this way then identified the root of existentialism’s dismissal as a credible philosophy we have still to address how understanding of this might ultimately redeem it. In different words, we have still to address how consideration of its dismissal as a humanism might allow us to recover the true meaning and distinctiveness of existential thought. And we can begin to approach this question by observing that Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism* does not, in contrast to subsequent French interpretations, dispense with a concern for ‘man.’ That is, we begin by contesting Rockmore’s claim that, ‘Heidegger in effect bases his later theory of being on the death of man.’⁴⁶ For rather, as we have already discussed, Heidegger’s very criticism of humanism is that it fails to ‘think the essence of man more primordially.’⁴⁷ And in this way it is not concern for the human itself which is the problem. Instead the problem is that in ignoring man’s relation to being humanism ends up assuming man to be an independent and substantial subject-entity. But why, we can ask, is this point significant? The answer is that if what we have said is correct it is possible to have a ‘return to man’ that is not humanist. For returning to our original question, if it is possible to avoid the limitations of humanism and yet still have a philosophy centred on man’s existence, then Heidegger’s *Letter* may in fact point the way to a more credible existentialism. And if this is the case then it will be from its condemnation as a humanism, and our subsequent attempts to refute that claim, that the true meaning and identity of existentialism will be garnered.

However, doesn’t such an argument run into an obvious objection? Namely, even if a non-humanist return to man is possible, doesn’t Heidegger make it clear that ‘existentialism’ is not capable of it? In short, doesn’t Heidegger make it clear that existentialism does not think man ‘more originally and therefore more essentially’ than humanism, but merely

⁴⁶ Rockmore, p181

⁴⁷ *LH*, p168, p169: ‘experience the essence of man more primordially’

provides an 'existentiell postscript' to its basic conception?⁴⁸ The answer is of course 'yes'. But it will be one of the contentions of this thesis that he is wrong on this point. That is, at least if we define 'existentialism' in terms of the work of Sartre and Nietzsche then it can not be characterised as merely 'adding to' humanism's conception. Instead, genuine existentialism can be understood as fulfilling the promise of a more 'primordial' account of man that Heidegger himself sets up in *the Letter*. In brief, existentialism can be seen as developing an account of man which *overcomes* the humanist conception. And we justify this point first of all by emphasising again that existentialism's return to man is not a return to some neglected inner domain of 'personal' subjectivity or experience. As Tillich argues, rather, just as existentialism 'does *not* identify Reality with 'objective being'⁴⁹,

...it would be equally misleading to say that it identifies Reality with 'Subjective being', with 'consciousness' or feeling. Such a view would still leave the meaning of 'subjective' determined by its contrast with 'objective' and this is just the contrary of what the Existential philosophy is aiming at.⁵⁰

In other words, just as existentialism does not base philosophy on an 'objective', 'external' domain of truth, nor does it retreat to an 'inner' subjective domain which is the objective's corollary. Instead as Tillich says, on one level 'It aims to cut under the 'subject-object' distinction.'⁵¹ And what this means is that when existentialism seeks a return to human existence, it does not seek the interiority of man but a return to his 'world'. That is, in returning to man's existence, it attempts to recover the world as being man's, as not separately 'out there' but as given with him. In short, it aims to show his 'existing in' as implying an 'existing in the world', and thus a fundamental intimacy with that world. And it for this reason then, we can say, that Heidegger's criticism of existentialism as an 'existentiell postscript' to humanism can be seen as misguided. For, existentialism is based upon a certain kind of unity of man and world. So for instance this is what we see in Sartre's notion of 'man-in-the-world'⁵², or in the unity of man and natural forces in Nietzsche. And this is the opposite of being a mode of humanism. In short it is the opposite of a philosophy which

⁴⁸ *LH*, p166-167, see also p155, where Heidegger criticises the 'addition' of the 'existentiell' and of 'life experience' to the humanist conception.

⁴⁹ Tillich, p92

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by H. Barnes [London: Routledge, 1958], p4

isolates a domain of ‘the subject’ from the world and then, even in relation to ‘immediate experience’, sets about describing it.

[ii] Perversity as a solution to the ‘man-world’ problem

Yet even if we have then shown that Heidegger is wrong in his characterisation of existentialism, does our means for doing so not pose another question? That is, if we have claimed existentialism *is not* a humanism by proposing a ‘unity’ of man and world, then does this not raise the question of how then ‘man’ is distinguished from that ‘world’? In brief, are we not here in danger of avoiding humanism precisely by moving towards the structuralist position of denying any distinctive subject whatsoever?⁵³ The answer, we suggest with Heidegger, is ‘no’. And the reason we can say this can be uncovered if we look more closely at what is meant by talking about man-in-the-world, and specifically how this is constituted by intentionality. For as Sartre argues in *Being and Nothingness*, the nature of man’s being-in-the-world is that man is always ‘consciousness *of* something’. That is, as he says, ‘there is no consciousness which is not a *positing* of a transcendent object, or if you prefer, that consciousness has no ‘content.’⁵⁴ However, if consciousness is nothing other than the intentional object, and there is no distinct domain in which it can be said to have ‘content’, this does not mean that he is purely identical with the object either. For rather the ‘of’ of intentionality already implies the *relation* of that positing. In other words, the intentionality of being-in-the-world implies that whilst man exists as *nothing other* than the positing of that world, he nonetheless exists as a distinctive ‘positing relation’ to it. That is, whilst there is no isolated domain of man, he can still ‘stand out’ as the content-less relation of that positing. And this means that it is possible to talk about a ‘unity’ of man and world that does not imply an absolute dissolving of one into the other.

However, of course, this raises a further question. For if we avoid the dissolution of the subject here and preserve a non-humanist existentialism, by saying that man is nothing other than a *relation* to the world, then what is this relation? In different words, how are we to understand a ‘relation’ which is not merely something man *has* but something that fundamentally he *is*? The answer proposed by this thesis is that we can do so by developing an idea found in Mulhall. That is, we can give an answer here and develop a non-humanist

⁵³ That there are just ‘structures’ of language, power etc.

⁵⁴ BN, pxxvii

‘return to man’, by seeing this relation in terms of an idea found in his religiously influenced reading of Nietzsche and Heidegger. For we can understand the idea of man as a substance-less relation to the world, by developing the idea found there of a ‘conception of ourselves as structurally perverse.’⁵⁵ And, the reason for this, centres upon the distinction between the idea of ‘perversion’ and that of mere ‘modification’. For if we understand ‘perversity’ as meaning not merely a modification of an original state but that state ‘as essentially turned against itself’⁵⁶ we can see how it addresses our problem. In other words, to say man is ‘perverse’ implies both that he exists as a modification of some prior being *and* at the same time that this modification is always, in its very movement away, bound up with the original. And thus it is in this sense that ‘perversity’ appears as an appropriate starting point to understand man *as* relation to the world. This is because if he is seen as a ‘perversion’ *of* a prior being then man can be understood as always *nothing other* than the world yet still possessing an existence meaningfully distinguishable from it. In short, conceiving of man’s being as ‘perversion’ allows us to understand him not as a variation on, or an ‘addition to’ the world, but *as* a perpetual and non-substantial relation to it.

[iii] Concrete interpretations of ‘perversity’: Nietzsche and Sartre

Consequently we can say that it is this notion of ‘perversity’ which provides a means to a non-humanist existentialism. That is, by rendering intelligible man *as* relation to world, it will pave the way for a ‘return to man’ that avoids either dissolving him altogether or conceiving of him as an independent and substantial subject-entity. But inevitably what we have said so far still remains on the level of unverified abstraction. In other words, if we wish to develop this claim that ‘perversity’ provides a means towards non-humanist existentialism, we must see how this idea takes concrete form in the thought of actual existential thinkers.⁵⁷ And it is for this reason then that in the first half of this thesis we will begin by looking at the philosophy of Nietzsche, and the notion of ‘perversity’ there. In particular, we will look at how for Nietzsche the human can be understood as a ‘perversion’ of fundamental natural

⁵⁵ S. Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005], p12

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p119

⁵⁷ We chose Nietzsche and Sartre since they are perhaps the two most paradigmatic ‘philosophical’ existentialists and the thinkers whose thought most accords with this idea. A similar project though could have been pursued with regards to other ‘existentialists’, especially early Heidegger. Considerations though of space, and his deliberate renunciation of the ‘existentialist’ label, made the Nietzsche-Sartre pairing seem more appropriate. Likewise, Freud’s discussion of perversity does not feature for the reason that his account of this is fundamentally ‘psychological’.

forces. That is, we will look at how as a perversion of these forces man can be seen as both *nothing other* than these forces and yet distinct from them. In this way, further, our interpretation will be situated in contrast to the two prevailing, in relation to our problem, ‘schools’ of Nietzsche criticism. For, on the one hand our approach will be distinguished from what can be called ‘humanist-existential’ readings. These emphasise Nietzsche’s concern with ‘man’, and his psychology, and claim like Solomon that ‘Nietzsche is a powerful defender of what one might call ‘the existential self’, the individual who ‘makes himself’...’⁵⁸

Our interpretation then will stand in contrast to those readings of Kaufmann, Solomon, Schacht, and Golomb which see Nietzsche as describing a substantial domain of ‘man.’ Rather, we will emphasise that man’s being *as a relation to* fundamental natural forces renders problematic any straightforward ‘existential psychology’ or naturalism.⁵⁹ That is, we will argue it necessary to think man ‘more primordially’ and to reject Heidegger’s criticism of Nietzsche as a ‘metaphysical’ and therefore humanist thinker.⁶⁰ On the other hand, our interpretation is also distinguished from what might be called anti-humanist readings. These allege that Nietzsche rejected ‘man’, appealing to a comment from *The Genealogy*. That is they appeal to the comment that ‘there is no ‘being’ behind the deed...’ and that ‘the doer’ is invented as an after-thought.’⁶¹ For such interpretations as are found with Kofman, Derrida, Foucault, and Ansell-Pearson,⁶² see Nietzsche as anticipating post-structuralism’s ‘death of man’, and therefore deny that he can be considered an ‘existentialist.’

As such, our interpretation will attempt to steer a path between these two kinds of reading. In short, we will, against the ‘anti-humanist’ reading, affirm that Nietzsche is fundamentally concerned with the world of man, but that, against the humanist one, this concern is not for a substantial or isolated domain of the subject. But how, specifically, returning to our original point, are we to set about doing this, and to explore the concept of perversity? The answer is that to begin with we will do so by looking at the ‘free spirit’, and how he emerges from a ‘perversion’ of man’s normal fettered state. That is to say, in our first

⁵⁸ R. Solomon, ‘Nietzsche on Fatalism and ‘Free Will’’, *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Vol. 23 [Spring 2002]: 63-87, p63

⁵⁹ For instance as with Leiter’s interpretation of, Nietzsche as a ‘naturalist’. See B. Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* [London: Routledge, 2002], chapter 1

⁶⁰ See *LH*, p163, p164

⁶¹ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* translated by C. Diethe [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], I: SS13, p26

⁶² See for instance S. Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor* [New York: Continuum, 1993] and K. Ansell-Pearson, *Virroid Life* [London: Routledge, 1997]

chapter we will explore how a type of philosophically significant individual comes to exist as a perversion of conservative instinctual forces. And looking at this issue in relation to Nietzsche's 1886 *prefaces*⁶³ we will therefore attempt to show how the 'free spirit' is more radical and philosophically interesting than the humanist view can allow. Continuing though, in our next chapter we will move from looking at the role of perversity for the individual to its relation to the human species as a whole. In other words, looking at *The Genealogy* we explore how man can be understood there as a 'perverse animal'. That is, we will see how he can be understood *as* a perversion of the active force of will-to-power. And we do this first of all by exploring the nature of 'bad conscience' as a perversion of the active instincts. We then will look at how this initial perversity is again perverted with *ressentiment* and slave morality. In short, we will look at how the slaves pervert the original 'active' force of the nobles and how this thus provides the basis for Nietzsche's critique of 're-active' values.

In this way then we will develop a sense in which man, both on the level of the individual and of the species, can be understood *as* being nothing other than the perversion of natural forces. Furthermore, in both cases we will see that we can distinguish between a 'primary' and 'secondary' perversity in relation to this. That is, with both we can distinguish between an initial perversity which founds man's being, and a 'secondary' perversity which subverts true awareness of that perverse founding. However, if by looking at Nietzsche we have thus explored the nature of man as a perversion of 'life' or natural forces, we have not thereby exhausted the nature of man as perverse. For, as we will go on to discuss in the second half of our thesis, man can also be understood as a perversion of what is called 'Being'. In different words, looking at Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, we will ask how man can be understood as a perverse non-being in relation to being, but still standing out from it. Moreover, this reading will be set in contrast to both the prevalent 'humanist' readings of Sartre and a mode of reading linking his thought to 'post-modern' concerns. Taking the former 'mode' first though, such readings do not 'ask about the relation of Being to the essence of man'⁶⁴ in Sartre. Rather, humanist commentators such as Murdoch, Warnock and Morris,⁶⁵ assume that Sartre in a Cartesian way simply 'begins' with consciousness. That is, they assume that, as Warnock says, 'It is the nature of human life, in this sense [what it is

⁶³ The prefaces written in 1886 for the works of his 'free spirit trilogy'

⁶⁴ *LH*, p153

⁶⁵ See also Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, p41, for the claim that Sartre is just interested in existential psychology.

like] which Being and Nothingness sets out to expound.’⁶⁶ In short, they assume he is merely concerned to elaborate an isolated domain of man.

Consequently, our reading of Sartre will contest this view. Instead we will suggest, against Heidegger,⁶⁷ that man for Sartre can only be understood as a *relation* to being, and that as such he cannot be conceived of as an isolated subject-entity. By the same token though, in saying this, and rejecting a certain idea of the subject, we will also attempt to avoid the kind of ‘New Sartre’ reading found in Fox. In short, we will also attempt to maintain Sartre as an ‘existentialist’ and avoid seeing his thought as linked to the ‘death of the subject’. Yet what is the specific means by which we will do this? First of all, to answer this, in our third chapter we will look at how man’s relation to the world can be understood in terms of ‘non-being’. That is to say, we will explore the way in which man’s existence is defined by the fundamental perversion brought to the heart of being which is nothingness. And, further, we will explore how consciousness of this perverse non-being is disclosed in the *existentiell* state of ‘angst’. Continuing, though, we will then complete our account of man *as* perverse non-being in our final chapter by looking at how it is that he evades awareness of this fact. In other words, looking at the evasion of angst and bad faith we will ask how it is that man comes to see himself in terms of the ‘present’ subject-entity of humanism. And finally we will argue that it is perversely his very non-being which allows for this denial of his being *as* perverse.

Yet with this, to conclude, will we then have answered the questions with which we set out? It is hoped so. For if we can develop a sense of man as a perversion of something other than himself, then we will have intimated how it is possible to avoid both the notion of an isolated subject entity and the dissolution of the subject altogether. That is, through Sartre and Nietzsche, we will have avoided the idea, as Heidegger says, ‘that for somebody who negates humanism nothing remains but the affirmation of inhumanity.’⁶⁸ And continuing, if this is the case we will have shown how a revitalised and philosophically credible existentialism is possible. For in turn, if with the concept of perversity it is possible to have a philosophy of man that is not humanist, then the conventional objection to existential thought does not hold. In other words, we will have shown that the idea of existentialism as the last gasp of a naive and romantic idea of the subject is essentially mistaken. And if this is true, further, space is created for a return to the original significance and distinctiveness of the

⁶⁶ M. Warnock, *BN* ‘Introduction’, p viii

⁶⁷ See *LH*, and Heidegger’s claim that Sartrean existentialism is not concerned with Being and is therefore humanist.

⁶⁸ *LH*, p169

existential movement. That is to say, defined now precisely *in opposition to* humanism, existentialism can fulfil the promise of Heidegger's *Letter*. In short, it can recover a meaning of man that is both more essential and more disturbing than either that which has existed in the social sciences, or which has existed in our everyday lives.

Chapter One: *Nietzsche's non-humanist existentialism [i] the free spirit as perverse genesis*

ABSTRACT: In our introduction we argued that a non-humanist existentialism was made possible by the concept of 'perversity'. That is, we argued that a 'return to man' not involving an isolated subject-entity was possible if we understood man *as* a perverse relation to something other than himself. However, we also said that this idea could be grasped properly only via the thought of actual existential thinkers. In brief, we said that to understand perversity as a means towards a non-humanist existentialism we had to explore this idea's development in actual existential philosophy. And we could begin with this project, we suggested, by looking at the role of perversity in the philosophy of Nietzsche. But how exactly are we to go about doing that? We start by observing that Nietzsche, like other existentialists, seeks to return philosophy to a concern with man's existence as it is concretely lived and experienced. In short, we start by noting that he seeks to develop a philosophy allowing man both to comprehend and transform his own actual existence. And, continuing, we observe that this concern is expressed at first for Nietzsche, in his discussion of various different human 'types', the most prominent of which is that of the 'free spirit'.

Yet, we are initially confronted by the fact that, like existentialism in general, this concern has typically been misinterpreted in a 'humanist' way. That is to say, that the free spirit has been viewed as simply the bearer of certain static human 'traits' or 'characteristics'. In other words, it is seen as just being distinguished by 'individuality', or a predilection for knowledge, one divorced from Nietzsche's wider discussion of natural forces. Consequently, in order to develop a non-humanist existentialism in Nietzsche, we must understand the free spirit in a different sense. And we will do this by looking at the free spirit not in terms of 'properties', but in terms of his *genesis*. In particular we will attempt to grasp the free spirit in terms of the genesis of a radical capacity for understanding, and this as based on the perversion of a prior 'fettered' state. For if we understand the free spirit *as* perverse genesis in this way, we can see him and his 'new understanding' not as an isolated property, but as a *relation* to natural forces outside of man. And if this is the case, we can say, it will be possible to address our initial questions and develop our thesis. For, if we can understand the free spirit *as* perverse genesis in this way, we will be able to articulate a non-humanist, non-'substantial', account of this human type. And further, if we are able to do this we can then

show how a non-humanist ‘return to man’, and hence existentialism, is developed in Nietzsche’s thought.

A. Introduction: *Existentialism and Nietzsche’s free spirit*

...it is only now, at the midday of our life, that we understand what preparations, bypaths, experiments, temptations, disguises the problem had need of before it was *allowed* to rise up before us, and how we first had to experience the most manifold and contradictory states of joy and distress in soul and body, as adventurers and circumnavigators of that inner world called ‘man’.

Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, Preface: SS7¹

On one level the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche may seem a strange place from which to launch a defence of existentialism. For, to begin with, it is widely doubted whether Nietzsche can indeed be called an ‘existentialist’ in the first place.² Given his interest in ‘drives’ and ‘instincts’, his naturalism, and his criticism of ‘free will’, that is, there are many who would deny the meaningfulness of that identification altogether. And further, even if most do admit *some* kind of connection there, it is rarely seen as central to his thought. Yet, following from our introduction, we will say that this commonly accepted assumption is wrong. For rather, if existentialism signifies a return to man’s existence as it is lived, then the existential concern can be seen to lie at the heart of Nietzsche’s philosophy. In other words, given that, as Schacht says, ‘Nietzsche was interested in what and how we [both as human beings and as human types- and as philosophers too] have come to be’³ then he is definitively an existentialist. And further, we can say, this concern does not stand in opposition to, but is

¹ F. Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human* trans. by R.J Hollingdale [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986]

² As mentioned in the introduction, poststructuralist influenced readings of Nietzsche deny that he is an existentialist. In fact even the ‘humanist-existential’ readings of Schacht, ‘Nietzsche: after the death of God’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism*, ed. S. Crowell [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012]: 111-136, and Kaufmann, W.A. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974], are equivocal on this issue. And in this respect Solomon’s assertion that Nietzsche *is* unequivocally an existentialist is relatively rare, see p63, R. Solomon, ‘Nietzsche on Fatalism and ‘Free Will’, *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Issue 23, [Spring 2002]: 63-87

³ R. Schacht, *Making Sense of Nietzsche: Reflections Timely and Untimely* [Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995], p2

unified with, the rest of his philosophy and his naturalism. For the concern with fundamental drives and instincts does not contradict the existential return to man, but is an essential part of it. In short, as we will see in this chapter, the ‘world of ‘man’ can be navigated properly, and existentialism defended, only in relation to instinctual forces lying outside of him. And it is this that makes Nietzsche’s thought in fact an ideal starting point for our project.

But then how are we to understand this relation and thus our starting point? How are we to understand how Nietzsche’s existential thought, as a concern for man that is bound up with natural forces, can point the way to a revitalised and philosophically credible existentialism? We can begin to answer these questions by asking first how Nietzsche’s concern for man specifically manifests itself. For is it not the case, one might ask, that what Nietzsche says about this topic is scattered and fragmented? That is, is it not the case that, even if he is interested in ‘man’, that his comments are sufficiently diffuse to mean they can not be the basis for any kind of systematic defence of existential thought? The answer, we can say, is ‘no’. And the reason for this is that whilst doubtless Nietzsche does discuss numerous human ‘types’ throughout his work, there is one that stands out both in terms of length and significance. In other words, as Reginster says, ‘Of all the types of human beings Nietzsche identifies, describes, and evaluates, very few are introduced as early in his writings and subjected to as much sustained analysis as the ‘free spirit’.’⁴ And it is this type, which Nietzsche holds up as the ‘common goal’ of his whole middle period⁵, therefore which provides the basis for answers to our previous questions. That is, it is Nietzsche’s account of the free spirit which both provides a refutation of the idea that no systematic treatment of his concern for man is possible, and a starting point for our discussion of his existentialism.

So, continuing then, it is the free spirit through which Nietzsche’s existential concern for man is principally expressed and also through which we attempt a defence of existentialism. However, we also at this point run immediately into another problem. For, following from our introduction, we can ask, isn’t this idea of the free spirit precisely the sort of ‘humanist’ conception which has led to existential thought being dismissed? In other words, isn’t the free spirit, with its connotations of non-conformity and ‘free spiritedness’, simply a variation on the romantic subject-entity with which existentialism has been

⁴ B. Reginster, ‘What is a Free Spirit? Nietzsche on Fanaticism’ *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, Vol. 85, No. 1 [2006]: 51–85, p51

⁵The first published edition of *The Gay Science* had printed on the back cover, ‘This book marks the conclusion of a series of writings by FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE whose common goal it is to erect a new image and ideal of the free spirit.’ Nietzsche was referring here to those middle works of his ‘free spirit trilogy’: *Human, All Too Human*, *Daybreak*, and *The Gay Science*. See Schacht. ‘Introduction’ in *HH*: pxxi. Note that the ‘Free spirit’ is also afforded an entire chapter in *BGE*, Part two: ‘The Free Spirit’

routinely, and pejoratively, associated? Unfortunately a survey of the literature on the topic would tend to suggest so. For the free spirit there has been typically viewed as simply a mode of the theoretically isolatable ‘substantial’ human subject, divorced from Nietzsche’s wider discussion of natural forces. That is, it is understood as a variation of subject-entity, distinguished purely by certain substantial, static, ‘characteristics’ affixed like properties to that basic conception. And this is for instance represented in Cohen’s identification of the free spirit with a certain capacity for individuality. For, as he says, free spirits are ‘people who are capable of developing individual opinions and of holding them in opposition to the social context of which they are a part.’⁶

Likewise, the free spirit has also been identified with particular beliefs, such as determinism⁷, and with the possession of a capacity for scientific or ‘historical’ knowledge. In particular, Franco is representative here when he talks about the ‘radically sceptical scientific attitude of the free spirit.’⁸ Continuing, as such, it is little wonder given this that many scholars have opted to ignore the free spirit altogether. That is, given the humanist overtones of the ‘free spirit’ discussion it is unsurprising that many have passed it over in favour of more philosophically ‘substantial’ topics in Nietzsche.^{9 10} However, as we will argue in this chapter, such an attitude is nonetheless misguided. For, as we will suggest, it is not necessary to dismiss the issue of the free spirit for being ‘humanist’, for the simple reason that the free spirit need not be interpreted in a humanist way. And we will see how this is possible, and how we can escape the view of the free spirit as a mode of subject-entity, by looking at something which these humanist accounts have ignored. In short we will escape

⁶ J. Cohen, *Science, Culture, and Free Spirits: A study of Nietzsche’s Human, All-Too-Human* [New York: Humanity Books, 2010], p139

⁷ See A. Mullin, ‘Nietzsche’s Free Spirit’ *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 38, no. 3 [2000]: 383-405, and P. Franco, *Nietzsche’s Enlightenment: The free-spirit trilogy of the middle period* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011], p32

⁸ Franco, p214. Note in addition that Cohen, Reginster, and K. Ansell-Pearson, ‘Free spirits and free thinkers: Nietzsche and Guyau on the future of morality’, in *Nietzsche, Nihilism and the Philosophy of the Future* ed. Jeffrey Metzger [London: Continuum, 2009] also emphasise this property of a ‘capacity for knowledge’ as being constitutive of the free spirit. Likewise P. Poellner in ‘Nietzschean Freedom’, in *Nietzsche on Freedom and Autonomy* ed. K. Gemes and S. May [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009] : 151-181, argues that we cannot understand the question of the ‘free spirit’ or ‘free person’ without understanding the question of the individual’s relation to truth [p177].

⁹ E. Fink, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy*, translated by Goetz Richter [London: Continuum, 2003] distinguishes between Nietzsche’s ‘existential sophistry’, p36, or ‘style’, as well as his ‘sophistical psychology’, p37, and the philosophical ‘substance’ of his work, p36-37. Such a philosophical substance, he then goes on to argue, is captured by the ‘fundamental’, leading thoughts of Nietzsche’s philosophy...the death of God, the will to power, the eternal return and the overman.’ p50.

¹⁰ Discussion of the free spirit concept is not found in a number of seminal studies on Nietzsche, notably Kaufmann, M. Heidegger *Nietzsche*, four volumes, translated by David Farrell Krell [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979] and G. Deleuze *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. translated by Hugh Tomlinson [London: Continuum, 2006]

the limitations of the humanist interpretation of the free spirit by looking at his *genesis*. That is, by looking at how the free spirit came to be.

But how will an exploration of this point allow us to do this? How if, as Nietzsche says, a free spirit is ‘a spirit that has *become free*’¹¹, and is not born into that state, will an understanding of this process lead toward a non-humanist understanding here? Well, the answer is that it is by looking at this process, we can see the free spirit in terms of a *relation* to something outside of itself. In particular that is, by looking at the free spirit’s *genesis* we will be able to see him, and his radical understanding, in terms of a perversion of a prior ‘fettered’ state. And it is then apparent how this point paves the way for a non-humanist understanding of the *Freigeist*. For if the free spirit can be understood on the basis of prior natural forces that define that ‘fettered’ state then he can no longer be seen as humanist. In other words, if the free spirit can be viewed as a perversion of something outside himself, then he no longer exists as a substantial entity divorced from natural forces, but *as* a perpetual and non-substantial relation to them. And continuing it is this then in turn which will allow us to address our earlier questions. For if by looking at his *genesis* it is possible to have a non-humanist account of the free spirit, then it is also possible to have a non-humanist ‘return to man’ in Nietzsche. In short, it will be possible, by challenging the humanist misinterpretation, to recover in his philosophy a non-humanist and therefore philosophically credible existentialism. And in this way we will thus be able through Nietzsche to lend concrete form to the abstract argument of our introduction.

B. The ‘fettered spirit’: *instincts and knowledge*

Yet how in turn, we now ask, are we specifically to go about doing this? In other words, if we have said that to develop a non-humanist existentialism through Nietzsche we must first look at the free spirit’s *genesis*, then where precisely do we start in understanding that process? The first point to emphasise in this regard is that what is at stake for Nietzsche with the free spirit’s *genesis*, and what distinguishes it, is a new kind of non-moral understanding. In other words, Franco is not entirely wrong when he suggests that the free spirit ‘embodies the ideal of the scientific quest for knowledge.’¹² For, doubtless, as Ansell-Pearson and others have noted, Nietzsche does link the free spirit to the possibility of a new kind of philosophical questioning and knowledge. And indeed this can be seen when he says

¹¹ F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* trans. by R.J Hollingdale [London: Penguin, 1979] ‘Human, All too Human’: SS1

¹² Franco, p48

of the new philosophers capable of a distinctive form of understanding that ‘they too will be free, *very* free spirits, these philosophers of the future.’¹³

Consequently then, returning to our question, it is the genesis of *this* new understanding that will serve as our starting point, and the focus of our chapter. For it is only by grasping how this distinctive understanding, from which all non-free spirits are barred, comes to be that we understand the free spirit’s genesis.¹⁴ And it is therefore in turn only through understanding this genesis, that a non-humanist conception of the free spirit can be developed. But then, continuing how are we to begin to grasp this process? The answer is that we will do so, first of all, by looking at the nature of that prior ‘fettered’ state which prevents us for the most part from attaining this new understanding. In short, we will do so by looking at the state of what Nietzsche calls the ‘fettered spirit’¹⁵, and the alignment of instincts there which block this understanding. For it is only by first outlining the natural forces at work there that we can see how they might be ‘perverted’ and a non-humanist free spirit born. In short, if as Nietzsche suggests, ‘a spirit in whom the type free spirit will one day become ripe...has had its decisive experience in a *great liberation*’¹⁶, we must ask *from what* this spirit is then liberated. That is, it is by looking at this state that we can explore the distinctiveness of the free spirit’s understanding and what process might be necessary to achieving it.

But what then we may ask, is this ‘fettered state’ from which the free spirit must be liberated? And why is one’s understanding necessarily limited within its confines? Nietzsche’s answer in simple terms here is that it is the ordinary or ‘everyday’ state, which we for the most part inhabit, which is responsible for ‘fettering’ us in this way. Furthermore the reason it does so is because of the alignment of certain natural forces in that state. That is, for Nietzsche the limitations on understanding in the fettered state, the ordinary state which all men initially inhabit, can be explained by the development of certain natural instincts there. And to understand Nietzsche’s point here we must begin by looking at what is said in his account of the ‘Origins of knowledge’. As he explains:

¹³ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* trans. by R.J Hollingdale [London: Penguin, 1973], SS44: KSA: 5.60

¹⁴ This is a question that, likewise, is not fully addressed in Mullin’s discussion of the free spirit. Like Ansell-Pearson, she discusses the distinction between the characteristics and values of the free spirit and those of the free thinker without explaining how this difference fundamentally came about. That is, whilst she provides an interesting account of the free spirit’s nature, especially in contrast as well to the ‘philosophers of the future’, she does not give an account of his *genesis*. Rather, she suggests only that in terms of this process ‘great pain and knowledge that wills are neither free nor unfree are both said to play this role’ [p397]. And she does not, further, elaborate on how or why this is the case.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ HH: I: Preface: SS3

Through immense periods of time, the intellect produced nothing but errors; some of them turned out to be useful and species-preserving; those who hit upon them fought their fight for themselves and their progeny with greater luck. Such erroneous articles of faith, which were passed on by inheritance further and further...finally almost became part of the basic endowment of the species...¹⁷

The point here then is that the human intellect initially produces potentially erroneous beliefs, such as for instance that our will is free or that life is ultimately meaningful. These errors are then when useful preserved and passed on first to specific communities of human and next, as Nietzsche suggests, to the species as a whole. However, what is significant in this process of selection is less the content of the beliefs that are preserved themselves, but rather the relationship between the individual and ‘belief’ in general which is thus encouraged. For if beliefs have proven themselves, by the fact they have survived to be inherited, to be life preserving, then this suggests that there exists an advantage for the individual to their acceptance. In other words, our survival chances are enhanced by accepting rather than questioning those ‘erroneous articles of faith’ that have endured and been handed down to us. Especially since these beliefs are ‘errors’ and therefore particularly susceptible to doubting, and hence ultimately to contradiction and abandonment, it serves the individual well *not* to engage in excessive or, from the view point of life, unnecessary questioning.

In this way we might assume that over thousands of years of human development and selection, this advantage to the acceptance of established values would encourage a strong instinct against radical questioning.¹⁸ And indeed this is what we find. For, historically as Nietzsche says, ‘Only very late did the deniers and doubters of such propositions emerge; only very late did truth emerge as the weakest form of knowledge.’¹⁹ Furthermore, this advantage to ‘acceptance’, and hence the promotion of an instinct *against* radical doubt, is for Nietzsche bolstered by another factor. This is one related to the value of ‘community’ itself, and it is explained in a passage from *Human, All too Human*. As Nietzsche says:

¹⁷ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* trans. by J. Nauckhoff [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001], SS110

¹⁸ This view stands in sharp contrast to that held by enlightenment thinkers for whom ‘nature’ and the instincts were thought actively to promote, rather than suppress, knowledge. Indeed as Cassirer argues, the enlightenment had assumed ‘the presence in the human soul of an innate thirst for knowledge’, something which was often referred to as the *libido sciendi*, See E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* translated by Fritz C.A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951], p14.

¹⁹ GS: SS110

History teaches that the branch of a nation that preserves itself best is the one in which most men have, as a consequence of sharing habitual and undiscussable principles, that is to say as a consequence of their common belief, a living sense of community. Here good, sound custom grows strong, here the subordination of the individual is learned and firmness imparted to character as a gift at birth and subsequently augmented.²⁰

Here we can say that for Nietzsche, a strong ‘living sense of community’ is founded on the acceptance of certain fundamental, and non-contestable, values and beliefs. These beliefs form the bedrock of the community and its strength, and their acceptance constitutes the ‘price’ for entry into that culture. In other words, these beliefs constitute that part of the individual’s natural inheritance which, without him having to realise it, buys him entry into that social group. However, it also follows by the same logic that any attempt from the individual genuinely to doubt that inheritance, and those common, ancient beliefs, must necessarily endanger his own position within that community. He risks, as Nietzsche said about the Wanderer, ‘finding the gate of the town that should offer him rest closed against him.’²¹ And this is something which would of course put his survival in jeopardy. Further, this risk is sufficiently great to mean that nature would not leave it to the vagaries of the conscious will, or prudential reason, to *recognise* the dangers of such doubting and then avoid it. Rather, as with physical pain, it is more efficacious for survival that the organism recoils instinctively from the first stirrings of fundamental doubt. That is, it is more efficacious for survival that this possibility is not allowed to reach the conscious mind to begin with.

As such, returning to our initial point, we can see why the instinct towards ‘acceptance’ of inherited values is here doubly bolstered. This is because the importance for survival of being a functional part of the community is likely to have favoured individuals possessing a capacity to suppress doubt, and accept certain beliefs easily. Over time protecting the individual from the dangers of excessive questioning, this would then have promoted as an instinct the unconscious or semi-conscious avoidance of doubt. And it is in this way therefore that we can discern a second sense in which, as Nietzsche says, quoting Byron, ‘The tree of knowledge is not that of life.’²² In other words, alongside the life

²⁰ HH: I: SS224

²¹ HH: I: SS638

²² HH: I: SS109

preserving qualities of the inherited errors themselves, we can add the importance of the human community. And it is this which constitutes another factor inveighing ‘life’ against ‘knowledge’. Taken together, these advantages accruing to ‘life’ for *avoiding* a form of ‘non-moral’ knowledge, then suggest that the instinct in favour of acceptance would be strong indeed. That is, these advantages show there would be a strong instinct to evade knowledge which contradicts the essential values and ‘good’ of the community.²³ And this would be the knowledge that stems precisely from questioning those inherited values which have, as Nietzsche says ‘almost become part of the basic endowment of the species.’²⁴

Moreover, the significance of this point to our discussion of the free spirit, and non-humanist existentialism should now be evident. For, returning to our earlier point, we have thus shown what the alignment of natural forces is in the ‘fettered’ state prior to the free spirit’s liberation. That is, we have revealed the instincts by which humans are, in their ordinary state, directed away from the *Freigeist*’s non-moral knowledge and doubt. And further, in this sense we have paved the way for understanding a non-humanist conception of the free spirit. For if we have seen what the alignment of natural forces is in the fettered state then we can potentially see how the free spirit might emerge as a perverse relation to them. In short, by outlining these prior instinctual forces, we can begin to see how the free spirit might exist as a perversion of those instincts. And in this sense, continuing, we can also begin to see how the *Freigeist* might not be the substantial subject-entity of humanism.

²³ Unfortunately it is difficult to specify more exactly what the nature of such ‘non-moral’ knowledge is. This is first of all because the content of such knowledge, which contradicts the perceived ‘good’ of the community, is relative to the community and culture in question. Secondly this is because only the free spirit could genuinely know what such knowledge was. Nevertheless we can speculate that this mode of knowledge might include a, broadly speaking, nihilistic understanding of human life. So, for instance, such knowledge might include the awareness that life may be ultimately unjustifiable or, as Sartre argued, that human beings must necessarily deceive themselves about their being. Likewise it might include a questioning of the value of morality itself, or a questioning of the value attached to the lives of most people.

²⁴ GS: SS110

C. The great liberation:

[i] Perverse deficiency and Imprisonment

However, in order to do this we must of course address a prior question. That is, in order to understand the free spirit as a perversion of the forces in man's initial state, we must ask what exactly the nature of this perversion is. In short, we must ask how a perversion within nature allows man to break with the conservative fettering instincts. And further we must then ask how this perversion gives birth to the free spirit's distinctive capacity for radical questioning. But how are we in turn to do all this? The answer to this question is, at first glance, far from obvious. And this is not least because if we are by nature fettered, it is unclear from where we could draw the resources to initiate such a break. Nevertheless, an explanation of sorts is given by Nietzsche in terms of what he calls 'the experience of sickness and recovery.'²⁵ This 'sickness', an exceptional experience linked to solitude and suffering, forms the subject matter of those prefaces he writes for his middle works, and it is this which he sees as necessary to 'liberation'. It is to such an experience which he refers then when he says that, 'One may conjecture that a spirit in whom the type 'free spirit' will one day become sweet and ripe to the point of perfection has had its decisive experience in a *great liberation*...' ²⁶ For the 'great liberation', that process by which the bonds of ordinary life are broken is, as he says, 'at the same time a sickness that can destroy the man who has it...' ²⁷ And it is this 'sickness' therefore, and the 1886 prefaces in which it is discussed, which hold the key to understanding that 'perversion' of natural forces that creates the free spirit.

Unfortunately however, the 1886 prefaces prove at first to be disappointingly opaque in this role.²⁸ Whilst continually referring to the significance of 'sickness', it is unclear initially where this comes from, or why it might allow us to break with the instincts which inhibit radical questioning.²⁹ Consequently, before addressing these questions regarding the prefaces and this 'experience' directly, it is helpful to take a step back. That is, we can step

²⁵ *HH*: II: Preface: SS6

²⁶ *HH*: I: Preface: SS3

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ See also J. Coker, 'The Therapy of Nietzsche's 'Free Spirit'' *International Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 29, no. 3 [1997]: 63-88, for a detailed exegesis of these prefaces. Unfortunately, though, Coker's discussion focuses more on the 'therapeutic' aspect of the free spirit as an ideal than it does on its genesis, and the role 'sickness' plays in this. For whilst Coker notes, in relation to Nietzsche's free spiritedness, that 'the great pain he experienced liberated him and taught him great suspicion' [p68], he does not explain how or why such pain would be able to do this.

²⁹ See C. Huenemann, 'Nietzschean Health and the Inherent Pathology of Christianity' *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 18, no. 1 [2010]: 73-89, for a discussion that focuses on 'sickness' as a cultural phenomenon.

back and ask in what way nature might encourage any kind of liberation. For, we can ask, if it is 'nature' which has established those instincts which keep us fettered, might she not also have provided a perverse counter balancing force or tendency? Clearly for Nietzsche the answer is affirmative. And this is because, first of all, of certain historical developments. That is, it is because of the development of man as a species that certain counter-tendencies emerged. And these allowed, we can say, the knowledge-fettering instincts to be challenged.

In particular here Nietzsche has in mind the development of the virtue of honesty or *Redlichkeit*. This virtue, as Nietzsche says, 'is the youngest virtue, still very immature, still often misjudged and taken for something else, still hardly aware of itself - something in process of becoming'.³⁰ And this still developing virtue shares with older virtues, like justice, the power to lead man to act contrary to the ostensible interests of 'life' and self-preservation. This is a point Nietzsche also makes when he talks about the related 'passion' of knowledge. For, as he says discussing the 'passion' of this virtue, desire for knowledge is a 'passion which shrinks at no sacrifice and at bottom fears nothing but its own extinction...'³¹ Like virtue then, this 'passion' leads us to pursue truth even when, or sometimes even because, it involves great sacrifice. And further, the reason why it leads us to do this is because of what Nietzsche calls a feeling of 'exaltation'. That is, as he says '...mankind must believe itself more exalted and comforted under the compulsion and suffering of *this* passion...'³² In other words, over time the pursuit of knowledge has led to a sense of superiority and 'exaltation', both in relation to other species and earlier 'barbarian' cultures. And it is then this historically evolved sense of power and exaltation, a sense that truth's pursuit makes us somehow 'divine', which leads to a drive contrary to the pursuit of survival.

Moreover, it is apparent with this then how nature establishes with man's development a perverse force counter to the fettering instincts. For in setting up the drive for truth as both a passion and a virtue, nature establishes a force opposing the self-preserving instinct to avoid radical truth. Unfortunately, however, a full elaboration of this historical aspect of nature's perverse counter-tendency is not something we have space to pursue further here. That is, we do not have space to explore how the passion of truth originated nor how this emerging virtue will eventually affect the development of future free spirits. Instead, placing the free spirit's relationship to these broader historical forces in parentheses, we will focus on how the fettering instincts are countered from the viewpoint of the individual. In

³⁰ F. Nietzsche, *Daybreak* trans. by R.J Hollingdale [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982], SS456

³¹ D: SS429

³² Ibid

short, we will focus on forces that apply only to specific prospective free spirits and not those that apply to the human species as a whole. And it is to do this then that we will now look at the perverse process which creates what Nietzsche calls ‘genius’. For as he says in *Human, All too Human*,

The way in which a prisoner uses his wits in the search for a means of escape, the most cold blooded and tedious employment of every little advantage, can teach us what instrument nature sometimes makes use of to bring into existence genius...it takes it and shuts it in a prison and excites in it the greatest possible desire to free itself.³³

In other words nature promotes liberation for certain individuals by perversely making existence within the established human community, and its schema of values, seem oppressive or painful. One might say then that just as contentment encourages acceptance of the established values, a sense of discontent could motive us to ‘escape’ from them. In this way for the prospective free spirit a feeling of restrictive pain could provide a force which counters those instincts keeping us fettered. The next question, though, is why anyone would experience the established values and its related mode of existence as painfully restrictive in the first place. Nietzsche’s answer lies in what may be described as the existence of ‘deficiency’ or ‘dysfunction.’ As he explains,

It has already been remarked that a mutilation, crippling, a serious deficiency in an organ offers the occasion for an uncommonly successful development of another organ...It is in this way one can suppose many a glittering talent to have originated.³⁴

Building on Nietzsche’s comments then, we can suggest that nature ‘imprisons’ certain men, and hence encourages them to find a means to escape, by giving them deficient ‘organs’ or capacities. It does this by causing what we can call ‘dysfunction’. To explain, if we say that an ‘organ’ is typically well adapted to dealing with a particular situation, then it follows that a ‘mutilated’ organ would make someone dysfunctional in relation to his

³³ *HH*: I: SS231

³⁴ *Ibid*

environment. In turn therefore, this ‘dysfunction’ would create for such a person a feeling of dissatisfaction and limitedness. And this is a point well illustrated by the image Nietzsche gives of ‘someone who has completely lost his way in a forest but strives with uncommon energy to get out of it again.’³⁵ That is, whilst someone whose capacities made him functional in relation to that situation would experience the ‘forest’ as a place of familiarity and meaning, the individual with ‘deficient’ organs would experience the opposite. He would instead, lacking the capacities with which to deal with the forest, find the *environment* itself alienating and restricting. In short, he would find himself ‘lost’ in that world and eager to escape.

Consequently it is apparent how nature might set up the *possibility* for the free spirit’s liberation based on a perversion of nature’s own normal instinctual forces and purpose. That is, by creating via deficient organs a feeling of dysfunction and hence ‘imprisonment’, nature also creates for certain individuals a desire to escape. We have thus seen how we can, as Nietzsche suggests, ‘apply these general indications as to the origin of genius to the specific case of the origin of the perfect free spirit.’³⁶ And, thus we have also seen how we can address the questions raised at the start of this section. For, if in creating deficient organs nature leads man away from his ‘normal’ fettered state, then we can start to understand the nature of that perversion which we said the free spirit *is*. In other words, with an account of ‘perverse deficiency’, we begin to see how the *Freigeist* emerges as a perversion of the ordinary instinctual forces initially described. And in this sense then, with this we can also begin to articulate a non-humanist conception of that type.

However, it is also clear that the account of such perversity given thus far is still for this purpose incomplete. For these ‘general indications’ and this ‘desire to escape’, based on deficiency, whilst necessary to explaining the free spirit’s liberation, are by no means sufficient. That is, as any observer of human reality could note, having a desire to be free is not the same thing as being able to realise it. Those instinctual forces, rooted in self-preservation, compelling us to accept the values of a community still for the prospective free spirit remain too strong. And this is significant because of the nature of our argument. For if we are to say the free spirit *is* a perverse relation then we must be able to explain how the perversion of those prior natural forces accounts for his *entire* becoming. In different words, perversion must be able to account for his entire liberation, and hence his entire being. And, in turn, this is significant since it means that if ‘perverse deficiency’ is insufficient to explain

³⁵ *HH*: I: SS231

³⁶ *Ibid*

that genesis then we need a further account of how this perversion is developed. In short, we need a further account of how the initial perverse ‘desire to escape’ is intensified and leads to complete liberation. It is only then, we can say, that a non-humanist conception of the free spirit can be properly given.

[ii] ‘Sickness’ and the cycle of despair

To do this though we must return to the issue mentioned initially, of sickness. For such ‘sickness’ can fulfil this function, and show how the genesis of the free spirit is accounted for entirely by the perversion of prior forces, by intensifying the initial desire for escape. In other words, the perversion of normal instincts is both expressed and continued in this existential experience, and shows how those fettering instincts can be ultimately overcome. But how specifically does it accomplish this? We can begin to answer this question by first noting that ‘sickness’ begins when the initial desire for escape leads to a certain state of ‘solitude’. Starting as a vague sense of discontent with the community, this desire makes us want to escape from others, to ‘discover a new path which no one knows’³⁷ and likewise to seek out ‘strange places, estrangements, coldness, soberness, frost...’³⁸ In other words this impulse, beginning a process which will end in liberation, leads to an initial experience of solitude.

Further, this solitude represents not simply or primarily the contingent state of ‘not being with others’, but a more fundamental experience of alienation from human life. This is the sense of separation Nietzsche intends when he asks whether ‘anyone could divine something of the consequences of that profound suspiciousness, something of the fears and frosts of the isolation to which that [his] unconditional *disparity of view* condemns him...’³⁹ Such solitude then is grounded in a fundamental ‘disparity of view’. This is a sense that our perspective is incommensurably separated from others; something that undermines the very possibility of any real connection or understanding. Moreover, the first experience of this ‘disparity of view’ in this sense has a significant consequence in terms of the developing process of sickness. For, unlike Montaigne, who believed that solitude led into a state of

³⁷ HH: I: SS231

³⁸ HH: I: Preface: SS3

³⁹ HH: I: Preface: SS1

tranquillity,⁴⁰ Nietzsche held that genuine solitude would open up onto a situation that was resoundingly painful.

Solitude that is to say, in the sense we have been describing it, leads to a certain form of suffering. And this is because the one experiencing true isolation for the first time finds that he is utterly alone in his troubles. As Nietzsche says, he must find that, 'No one comes along to help him: [and that] all the perils, accidents, malice and bad weather which assail him he has to tackle by himself.'⁴¹ In other words the initiate in solitude finds that for ones troubles and difficulties, there can be no understanding, no help, and no consolation from others. He must begin to abandon, against all previous expectation, the hope naturally vested in our association with others. And this, suggests Nietzsche, is a wrenching experience. In this fashion therefore, despite on one level wanting 'escape' and solitude, the prospective free spirit must still experience this first isolation as traumatic. Put another way, his desire to escape one form of pain, the stifling imprisonment of the human community, must lead him straight into another.

This freshly experienced pain, however, is not for this reason without meaning. Rather the suffering itself serves a significant role in the intensification of the desire to escape. And it does so due to the fact that it promotes, in turn, deep suspicion. As Nietzsche explains,

Only great pain, that long slow pain that takes its time and in which we are burned, as it were over green wood, forces us philosophers to descend to our ultimate depths and put aside all trust, everything good natured, veiling, mild, average - things in which formerly we may have found our humanity.⁴²

And Nietzsche's argument here seems to be that when we suffer greatly we are instinctively led to suspect a cause for that suffering in the things around us. Thus because 'pain always asks for the cause'⁴³, we lose faith in the 'good natured' and 'veiling' surface of things and instead look for the dark and the questionable behind everything. In short therefore, such pain leads us to a state of deeper suspicion, and this will accelerate even further the process of sickness that has been set in train.

⁴⁰M. Montaigne, 'On Solitude', from *The Essays: A selection*, translated by M.A. Screech [London: Penguin, 1991] SS39, p99: 'let us gain power over ourselves to live really and truly alone- and of doing so in contentment.'

⁴¹D: Preface: SS2

⁴²GS: Preface: SS3

⁴³GS: SS13

To explain why this is the case though, we need to consider what consequences ‘suspicion’ will in turn have within this experience. For Nietzsche says that the free spirit, when looking again at the society of men, after his first true experience of solitude, ‘will behold in the faces of those who dwell there even more desert, dirt, deception, insecurity, than lies outside the gate...’⁴⁴ In other words, the suspicion born of solitude’s suffering will be turned back against men themselves. The free spirit will now suspect in men and their works everything petty, dissembling, and base, and will begin to develop what Nietzsche calls ‘a pathologically clairvoyant contempt for humanity.’⁴⁵ And this contempt, making all attachments seem increasingly pointless and impossible, will only serve to encourage a further alienation from others. In this way therefore, promoting such alienation, suspicion encourages an even more despairing solitude, and will accelerate still faster the perverse process of sickness we have been elaborating.

Furthermore, it is apparent now why such an acceleration of sickness might be capable of bringing about the ‘great liberation’. As we have seen, the initial and inchoate desire for escape, stemming from a feeling of imprisonment, leads at first to a state of preliminary solitude away from the human community. This first real experience of solitude, of a fundamental disparity of view, we then saw leads to a state of psychological or existential suffering. Continuing then, this suffering in turn causes the emergence of a new suspicion, a desire to see the dark and questionable behind everything. Finally, we argued this suspicion leads back, through contempt for men, to even greater solitude. As such we have traced the experience of sickness, and seen how it can be characterised as a vicious ‘cycle of despair’. This is a process, that is, in which the initial desire for escape provokes a self-perpetuating vortex whereby solitude leads to pain, pain to suspicion, and suspicion to still greater pain and greater solitude. And this is something which will drag its victims to the very depths. As Nietzsche says, the fate of one caught in this cycle is terrible, ‘Solitude encircles and embraces him, ever more threatening, suffocating, heart tightening, that terrible goddess and *mater saeva cupidinum*...’⁴⁶

Returning to our initial question then, it may also be evident why this process of sickness, and the experience which lies in its ‘depths’, can bring about liberation. It is also therefore evident how this allows us to explain the perversion of prior natural forces as accounting for the free spirit’s *entire* being. For from the deepest solitude must emerge also

⁴⁴ HH: I: SS638

⁴⁵ GS: Preface: SS1

⁴⁶ HH: I: Preface: SS3: ‘*mater saeva cupidinum*’: wild mother of the passions’

the deepest pain, and with the deepest pain the most profound suspicion. Thus from the bottom of the vortex, from the depths of solitude and despair, must emerge what Nietzsche calls the ‘great suspicion’, that otherwise inaccessible power of doubt which ‘only great pain’ can teach us.⁴⁷ And it is clear in turn why this *great suspicion* can liberate the spirit. For such a radical doubt is for the first time capable of overcoming the powerful instincts which we said were set *against* radical questioning. In other words the great suspicion, as the fulfilment of both sickness and that initial perverse desire for escape, allows the balance of forces to move decisively against the conservative instincts. And in this sense then we can now answer the question raised at the start of this section. For if with ‘sickness’ we can understand how that initial desire for escape was intensified and resulted in the free spirit’s complete liberation then we can see how his whole being can now be defined by perversion. That is, if the initial desire for escape emerged as a ‘perversion’ of prior natural forces, then its intensification with sickness, and the creation of the free spirit with that, gives us this type completely *as* a perverse relation.

D. Romanticism as secondary perversion:

[i] Consolations

But does this then mean our account of the free spirit is complete? Does this mean we have succeeded in fully giving an account of the free spirit *as* a perverse relation to something other than itself, and hence in overcoming the humanist interpretation of the *Freigeist*? The answer is ‘no’. For we can say at this stage that our non-humanist account of the free spirit still remains on too abstract a level. And this in turn is because we have not addressed a crucial, and concrete, question pertaining to the free spirit’s perverse liberation. That is, we have not addressed the question of whether anyone could in reality cope with the ordeal of sickness as it has been described. For given that the experience involves unavoidable, and increasingly intense, suffering, is it not more realistic to assume that we would find some means to escape it? That is, would we not discover some anaesthetic or consolation which would derail us before we ever reached the depths necessary for the ‘great suspicion’? It is this question then of a derailing consolation which we must address if we are to complete our account of the free spirit. In short, it is the question of what we call

⁴⁷ GS: Preface: SS3

‘secondary perversion’, and how to escape this, which must be answered before we can fully understand the free spirit as perverse.

Yet what, in turn, is that consolation? And in what sense is it a ‘secondary’ perversion of the initial perversity we have described? Well, the first thing to note is that Nietzsche is not here concerned with the consolations and anaesthetics used by most people to avoid spiritual suffering, and which abound in the modern world. He takes it for granted that prospective free spirits, in whom he is principally interested, will possess sufficient pride and intelligence to avoid the vulgar consolations of religion, narcotics, and mass culture. Rather his concern is that these individuals will fall prey to a far more subtle and insinuating consolation, one whose strength rests precisely in the suggestion that it is not a consolation at all. That is, his concern is that they will fall prey to what he calls ‘romanticism’. And, furthermore, as we will see, such a consolation gains its power by leeching upon, and turning against itself, the honest pessimism and suffering of sickness.

Such romanticism, though, to explain, is not primarily to be thought of in terms of the artistic and philosophical movements which bear that name.⁴⁸ Instead, says Nietzsche, romanticism is defined as that ‘unscientific basic tendency’, ‘to interpret and inflate individual personal experiences into universal judgements and, indeed, into condemnations of the world.’⁴⁹ In other words, romanticism is that psychological inclination on the part of sufferers to identify their own experiences, specifically their pain, with ‘reality’ or the world as a whole. Such a gesture then, in universalising their experience, ‘idealises’ or ‘inflates’ it. That is, it suggests that what would otherwise be his narrow and isolated suffering is in fact of profound and universal significance. And what’s more we can see why this would offer a surreptitious consolation. This is because the sufferer, in idealising or ‘romanticising’ his pain, can now take a perverse and inflated pride in his situation. He can, in short, ‘aestheticize’ both his suffering and his loneliness, and imagine that he is playing the role of a noble and tragic hero.

Moreover for Nietzsche, such an idealisation, as well as giving a pleasing view of our situation, also offers the consolation of allowing us to evade the real nature of our plight. And

⁴⁸This is how ‘romanticism’, and Nietzsche’s relation to it, has typically been construed by commentators. That is, romanticism has been understood primarily in terms of a certain cultural or philosophic perspective, one represented by ‘romantic’ figures such as Wagner, Goethe and Schopenhauer. Such a view, moreover, has led to a division between those scholars, like Kaufmann, see chapter 4, p124, who believed that Nietzsche successfully distinguished his philosophy from the values of romanticism and those who assert that, like Bowie, A. Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: from Kant to Nietzsche* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003], he did not.

⁴⁹ *HH*: II: Preface: SS5

this is because the true nature of suffering, considered honestly, is something deeply un-romantic. As Nietzsche makes apparent when he lists the ‘ills’ by which he was surrounded, mentioning ‘sickness, solitude, unfamiliar places, acedia, inactivity’⁵⁰, suffering is instead banally ‘all too human’. That is, suffering, and solitude in particular, is in many ways petty, and futile, characterised by a boredom and frustration which is in no sense either ‘tragic’ or meaningful. Indeed we might add, if only suffering were in fact ‘profound’, if only we did feel at the centre of some great tragedy, then it would not be so difficult to endure. But unfortunately it is the very pettiness of it all, its evident lack of greatness or meaning, which makes it so insufferable.

Furthermore, romanticism allows the free spirit to evade what Nietzsche calls ‘the real idiosyncrasy of his suffering.’⁵¹ Nietzsche refers here to the reality of suffering as that which is ‘most personal, singular, narrow’⁵², as something incommensurable with the experiences or even the suffering of others. In fact this ‘idiosyncrasy’ is such that like radical solitude it cannot, even in principle, be understood by or communicated to others. And this means, as a result, that imposed on the individual is an absolute and traumatising state of isolation, one in which we are radically and inescapably thrown back on ourselves. Yet in subtle fashion, romanticism permits us to side-step the full reality of this. It is able to do so, further, because in universalising its particular and idiosyncratic suffering, it holds open the possibility of a communication or connection. In other words, it fosters the illusion that because of the imagined link between his suffering and the fundamental reality of the world, that someone else might be able to understand his situation.

What’s more, this hope is manifest in, and fetishized by, the ‘tragic’ or ‘heroic’ pose the romantic pessimist adopts. Implicit then in the idealisation that goes on in the adoption of this role, is the desire and hope for mutual understanding, even if this were restricted to only a single person in the world. For the posture of the tragic and isolated hero is nonetheless still a pose adopted *before others*, with others in mind. Like the poet in *Zarathustra*, the romantic’s tragic performance, we might say, requires spectators, requires an audience.⁵³ And these spectators need not even be ‘real’ or present. Alone on a mountain, or in a bedsit somewhere, he can still play the role, creating for himself the indistinct fantasy that his pain

⁵⁰ *HH*: I: Preface: SS2

⁵¹ *GS*: SS370

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ See F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* trans. by R.J Hollingdale [London: Penguin, 1961], II: ‘Of Poets’

is being watched, that he is the character in some nebulous yet significant cosmic drama.⁵⁴ Consequently, for all his protestations and cries of anguish, the romantic never has to face the blunt, cold, reality of solitude. He never has to face the absolute, and absolutely irredeemable, state it involves. For this reality can in the end be neither heroic nor romantic; it is rather only a void, the silence where all gestures and exclamations become pointless, where all hope of understanding is frozen.

The nature of romanticism as a consolation to the sufferer, thus now becomes apparent. Its idealisation, as we have seen, allows one to avoid not only the true banality of suffering, but also its idiosyncratic and thereby profoundly isolating character as well. However its force as a consolation, and hence the danger it represents to the prospective free spirit, does not end there. This is because whilst romantic idealisation begins as a general psychological tendency, it is also inevitably amplified by the expressions it finds in art and culture. In particular here Nietzsche has in mind Schopenhauer's philosophy of the will, and Wagnerian music.⁵⁵ He criticises the latter especially, and all 'romantic music', for being 'that ambiguous, inflated, oppressive art that deprives the spirit of its severity and cheerfulness and lets rampant every kind of vague longing and greedy, spongy desire.'⁵⁶ This music then, is the artistic manifestation of that 'inflation' or idealisation of experience described earlier, which leads to a fundamental mendacity of spirit.

Worse though, this music, as well as originating in those romantic tendencies, further nurtures and exacerbates them. And this is why Nietzsche identifies romantic music, and art more generally, with the 'feminine'. As he goes on to say, 'such music unnerves, softens, feminises, its 'eternal womanly' draws *us*- downwards!'⁵⁷ Romantic music then is associated with the traditional female qualities of pretence and mendacity, and also with 'softness', weakness, and lack of self-discipline. Such music surrenders to what is easiest and most appealing, the desire for an idealisation which anaesthetises the full truth of pessimism. However as Nietzsche's comment makes apparent, this music expresses the 'eternal feminine' in another key respect: it is that which attempts to seduce, and destroy, the 'masculine'. That is, he refers here to that 'manly' courage, strength, and self-discipline

⁵⁴ As such, the romantic pessimist has not overcome a critical element of Christianity. For the Christian, like the romantic, suffers *before* God and his suffering is, likewise, redeemed and rendered meaningful by the divine audience. It is for this reason that Nietzsche says that the Christian is 'essentially a romantic': *GS*: SS370

⁵⁵ For a study of Nietzsche's relationship to the key ideas and figures of German romanticism, including Wagner and Schopenhauer, see A. Del Caro, *Nietzsche contra Nietzsche: Creativity and the Anti-Romantic* [Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1989]

⁵⁶ *HH*: II: Preface: SS3

⁵⁷ *Ibid*

required honestly to face ‘the sight of what is terrible and questionable.’⁵⁸ As such, romantic art, like the siren song, strives to undermine this strength, employing the dark feminine arts of dissemblance and seduction to ‘feminise’ and hence destroy the masculine.

It is then no surprise to hear Nietzsche offering the wisdom ‘*beware music*’ as ‘advice to all those who are man enough to insist on cleanliness in things of the spirit.’⁵⁹ For music, and romantic art in general, pose an immanent threat to those still struggling with their romantic inclinations. In short, such art threatens to decide any conflict decisively in favour of the romantic. Further this danger is made all the worse by what Nietzsche calls the ‘mendaciousness’ of romantic pessimism.⁶⁰ That is, romanticism and romantic art, in fitting with its ‘feminine’ character, disguises its own true nature and purpose. It admits neither that it is really a consolation nor that it is based on an idealisation of suffering. Rather it seduces insidiously by presenting its relation to suffering as wholly authentic and truthful. As such, it presents the romantic illusion of pain as ‘profound’ and ‘tragic’ as if this were the closest and most honest proximity to suffering it is possible to have. In other words it imagines that in exaggerating and glorifying pain it had plumbed to its very ‘depths’. Therefore, in a perverse inversion, the sufferer who thought himself too proud for anaesthesia can take up romanticism and imagine that it expresses his own heroic renunciation of consolations. He can believe that is, in the moment of romantic intoxication which dulls and distorts pain, that he has discovered the greatest sensitivity to it.

[ii] Treatment

Consequently, to return to our initial question, we have shown what the essential consolation is within the experience of sickness. That is, we have seen in romanticism that fundamental perverse consolation which threatens to derail prospective free spirits before they reach the depths of suffering necessary for liberation. And in this sense we have in part addressed the concrete and critical question needed to complete our account of the free spirit as perverse. For we have described concretely the consolation which haunts the reality of his genesis. That is, we have seen how romanticism’s consolations are not only powerful and deeply rooted in the psychology of suffering, but are reinforced by a romantic culture of art which gives these even greater seductive form and expression. Moreover, the seductive

⁵⁸ GS: SS370

⁵⁹ HH: II: Preface: SS3

⁶⁰ HH: II: Preface SS4

power of these consolations is also enhanced still further by the very dissembling and ambiguous nature of romanticism itself. In short, it is enhanced by the fact that it disguises its own character as an anaesthetic and appears as such a 'natural' reaction to suffering. And it is in this sense, continuing, that it can be understood as a 'secondary perversion'. For such a consolation utilises the suffering of sickness, but in order to deny and suppress honest awareness of that suffering, and of its perverse origin.

Yet we can say, despite this, we still have not completely given an account of the free spirit as perverse. For in order fully to understand the free spirit's genesis, and hence his nature *as* a perverse relation, we must ask one final question about the concrete reality of that process. That is, we must ask how it is possible to 'counter' romanticism and thus to reach the depths necessary for liberation without being derailed by romantic consolations. And indeed this is a question Nietzsche takes seriously. For, as he says, the strength of those consolations and their appeal is such that 'our pessimists of today...are one and all still in danger of romanticism.'⁶¹ But how does he then propose that we counter this danger? Well to begin with, as we have seen, one of romanticism's key strengths is its self-concealing ambiguity or even invisibility. Therefore by just making the nature of romantic pessimism explicit in his discussion, by exposing its status as a consolation, Nietzsche already undermines its potential attraction. Especially in showing this consolation to be a symptom of dishonesty and weakness, he can then pique the pride of today's pessimists and encourage them to diagnose and critique their own romantic tendencies.

However this is only the beginning of the means by which we are to counter romanticism, it is only the first step in what Nietzsche calls his 'anti-romantic self-treatment.'⁶² A critical diagnosis of romantic pessimism is as such, given the strength of the illness in question, alone going to be insufficient. Rather what is also needed, claims Nietzsche, is subscription to a set of existential 'precepts', precepts which he claims are disclosed in the second volume of *Human, All Too Human*. As he says there,

...may these same writings now...teach their precepts more powerfully and clearly- they are *precepts of health* that may be recommended to the more spiritual natures of the generation just coming up as a *disciplina voluntatis*.⁶³

⁶¹ *HH*: II: Preface: SS2

⁶² *Ibid*

⁶³ *Ibid*

Evidently then, the nature of the ‘cure’ for romanticism here is not fundamentally that of rational argument; we will not be cured simply by understanding what the illness is or why it is so harmful. Instead we will counter romanticism by following certain ‘precepts of health’, that is, rules or practices for living. And this means obeying the precepts of an anti-romantic ‘regimen of health’, one which schools the reader in the practices of a certain spiritual hygiene and discipline.

Such a ‘regimen’ we might imagine, will include the ‘forbidding...totally and on principle, [of] all romantic music’⁶⁴ and romantic art in general. More importantly, though, it will involve the practice of a peculiar kind of asceticism. As Nietzsche says, ‘A *minimum* of life, in fact an unchaining from all coarser desires...-all this finally resulted in a great spiritual strengthening.’⁶⁵ Nietzsche therefore suggests that the ‘spiritual strengthening’ required to combat romanticism will come about through a deliberate ascetic practice and discipline. And this means, following his ‘regimen’, we commit ourselves to a certain kind of ascetic existence, one in which we intentionally restrict desire and limit ourselves to a ‘minimum of life’.

The mode of ascetic life outlined here, and in the third essay of *The Genealogy*, though, is not to be simply equated with traditional religious forms of asceticism. Whilst there are of course similarities, Nietzsche’s asceticism does not have the aim, as these do, of pairing down desire in order to limit ‘suffering’ and in the end to escape it. Rather what is intended is a strategic withdrawal from certain areas of life and desire, to in fact facilitate a more profound sensitivity to suffering, and to life as a whole. This is achieved first of all by the free spirit withdrawing, via ascetic practice, from what Nietzsche describes as the ‘coarser desires.’ And this means, as he says in *The Genealogy*, ‘the avoidance of three shiny loud things, fame, princes, women...’⁶⁶ Again though, this is not done because these desires are regarded as ‘sinful’ or because their avoidance makes us virtuous. Rather it is done to protect the individual from an unproductive frustration, distraction and suffering which inevitably arises from their pursuit. That is, it is done to protect the individual from the frustration caused by seeking public acclaim, power, and sexual gratification. Freed then from these distractions we are able to discover ‘good, thin, clear, free, dry air, like the air in the mountains, in which all animal existence becomes more spiritual and takes wings.’⁶⁷ And

⁶⁴ *HH*: II: Preface: SS3

⁶⁵ *HH*: II: Preface: SS5

⁶⁶ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* trans. by C. Diethe [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 3: SS8

⁶⁷ *GM*: 3: SS8

amidst such clear and still surroundings, not weighted down by any ‘gnawing worms of wounded ambition’⁶⁸, is developed a certain lightness of spirit. In short, in such surroundings we develop a spirit that is fundamentally well-disposed towards existence.

However, such ‘lightness’ or serenity of spirit is not for Nietzsche the goal either. It is instead another means. And its purpose is, ironically, to allow the individual to confront a different kind of suffering. This is not though the crude suffering born of ‘gnawing worms of ambition’ and the coarser desires, but that which is associated with the wisdom of Silenus. This is the wisdom given in legend when the daemon is asked what the ‘most preferable of all things for man is’ and responds that, ‘The very best of all things is...not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best thing for you is- to meet an early death.’⁶⁹ In other words the problem posed is that of a profound and terrible pessimism: that perhaps human existence cannot be justified. That is, that all things considered honestly, non-existence is preferable. And we can say that such a pessimism necessarily involves a different and more profound suffering. For, to take this seriously requires that we ourselves confront experientially what is most terrible and questionable about existence.

To return to our point though, we will be able to do this and confront honestly this second mode of suffering only if we can remain ‘light of spirit’. And this in turn means limiting our sensitivity to the crude form of suffering. As such, we paradoxically restrict one mode of suffering in order that we can suffer more deeply at the hands of another. The man who is not tormented by coarse desire can then afford himself the luxury of a more painful and honest experience of life. That is, as Nietzsche says, ‘He who is richest in fullness of life...can allow himself the sight of what is terrible and questionable.’⁷⁰ On the other hand the man who is too much assailed by coarse suffering will be left quickly sullen and heavy hearted. Thus such a man will have little strength left to endure the deeper suffering of existence, and will quickly fall prey to romantic consolations. Further, we might say, it is this paradoxical logic which lies at the heart of Nietzsche’s entire discussion of pessimism. And this is summed up in his seemingly perverse claim that he is ‘a pessimist- well disposed *towards* pessimism- and thus in any event no longer a romantic.’⁷¹ In other words, to endure the most profound suffering, and to do so without seeking romantic consolation, one must paradoxically be light of heart and spirit. Or put another way, and as Nietzsche’s comment

⁶⁸ *GM*: 3: SS8

⁶⁹ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* trans. by D. Smith [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], I: SS3, p27

⁷⁰ *GS*: SS370

⁷¹ *HH*: II: Preface: SS2

suggests, one can remain an honest pessimist only by being fundamentally well disposed towards life.

Conclusion: *A non-humanist free spirit*

We have seen then what might be required to remedy the threat of romanticism. To begin with, as discussed, a critical exposure and diagnosis of romantic pessimism is necessary. However, in addition what is required is adherence to a certain ascetic ‘regimen of health’. This asceticism works by restricting sensitivity to the crude form of suffering and, thus encouraging a lightness of spirit, allows us better to endure another more profound suffering. Consequently Nietzsche hopes to show how an honest pessimism, which is able to confront such suffering, is possible without recourse to the consolations of romantic idealisation. And if successful this has implications for the rest of our discussion. For with this then we have addressed fully the concrete reality of the free spirit’s genesis. That is to say, we have not only described the consolation which is an immanent threat to the prospect of his liberation, but shown how this threat can be overcome. In short, we have shown how sickness can lead to the depths of suffering necessary for the great suspicion, and liberation, without being derailed by romantic consolation. And in this way we have thus given full and concrete form to our conception of the free spirit as perverse.

This is because, to explain, we saw initially how the free spirit’s genesis began with a perversion of those instincts in the prior fettered state. We saw how ‘deficiency’, a perversion of those initial instincts, led to a desire to escape, tied to the free spirit’s defining possibility of radical understanding. However we said we could thus see the free spirit *as a perverse relation* to those prior forces only if that initial perversion fully led to his liberation from the fetters on understanding. As such then we discussed the way in which the initial perversion, the desire to escape, was intensified. And we did this through a discussion of sickness. We explored the ‘cycle of despair’ which accomplished this liberation, and showed how we see the free spirit as perverse, as this sickness leads man to the depths of suffering and suspicion. Continuing, though, we said that even with this our discussion still did not grasp the free spirit fully as perverse. That is, we said our discussion was not still complete as we neglected the essential, concrete, question of how we could ever endure that suffering. Consequently then by describing the fundamental consolation in that state of sickness, and how we counter it, we are able to answer this question and give a full concrete account of sickness. And since

this sickness, as the intensification of the initial perversity, is what allows us to understand the free spirit *as* perverse, it is this then that allows us to give a full account of this perversity. In brief, by fully describing the process of the free spirit's genesis from initial natural forces, we have also seen concretely how he can exist as a perverse relation to something outside of himself.

But what is the importance of this for our discussion as a whole? Well the answer, going back to the start of this chapter, is that by understanding the free spirit as a perverse relation in this way we can overcome the humanist conception of that type. In other words, by understanding the free spirit as a non-substantial relation to natural forces outside of himself, we get beyond the idea of the *Freigeist* as an isolated subject-entity. That is, we get beyond the idea of the free spirit as a theoretically self-sufficient subject, distinguished purely by certain substantial 'characteristics' or properties. And this then in turn allows us to develop the thesis outlined in our introduction. For if we can describe a non-humanist conception of the free spirit we can then show how for Nietzsche a return to 'that inner world called man',⁷² is possible which is not humanistic. In different words, we can show how a concern for 'what is *close at hand*',⁷³ for man's existence, his sufferings, his loneliness, his desires, is possible which does not depend upon a philosophically discredited subject-entity. And this then, to return to our overall purpose, gives us the first step toward a revitalised existentialism. For if continuing, with Nietzsche's free spirit we can describe a 'return to man', and hence an existentialism, which avoids such humanism we can then avoid the central objection to this mode of thought. In short, by giving concrete form to an existentialism *without humanism* we not only begin to escape the ossified image of this philosophy, but to recover its true distinctiveness and import.

⁷² HH: I: Preface: SS7

⁷³ HH: I: Preface: SS5

Chapter two: *Nietzsche's non-humanist existentialism [ii] Perversity and genealogy*

ABSTRACT: Our first chapter gave concrete form to the thesis outlined in the introduction. That is, we tried to show what could concretely be meant by man *as* a perverse relation to something other than himself, and how this then allows for a non-humanist existentialism. Further, continuing, we did this by looking at Nietzsche's discussion of the free spirit. For we discovered, through this, that the concrete form of man's perverse relation for Nietzsche is man *as* becoming. In other words, we discovered that it is by understanding man's genesis that we can see him *as* a perversion of natural forces, and hence not as humanism's independent subject-entity. However, it is also evident on this basis that our discussion at this stage still remains limited. For if Nietzsche's non-humanist existentialism is premised on man *as* an emergence from natural forces, then an account of the free spirit gives us only a relatively 'individual' sense of this process. That is to say, our discussion of man *as* becoming must move beyond the more localised sense of perversion, pertaining to individual experiences of self-overcoming, and look towards a wider sense of development. In short, more fundamentally to grasp man *as* genesis we must look toward the development and *origins* of the human species as a whole. And it is for this reason that the present chapter will explore that which Nietzsche sees as essential to this process: the genealogy of moral values.

Yet, as with the free spirit, we find this process is typically construed in a humanist fashion. What this means is that man's species past is usually seen as a 'property' of a subject-entity, something he 'has' but which is not essentially what he *is*. And this view is evidenced particularly in most interpretations of Nietzsche's *Genealogy*. For there, both bad conscience and the slave revolt are understood as settled objects of history, part of what we are, but no longer 'at stake'. In other words, viewing both these developments as entirely necessary for man they forestall the possibility of transformation, and hence of this past as 'alive' and integral in our existence. But how do we escape from such 'humanism'? Well, the answer is that we escape the humanist interpretation of our past by understanding it as still bound to the living possibility of critique and overcoming. And we achieve this in turn by suggesting that bad conscience and *ressentiment* are not both inevitable aspects of what we are. For we suggest that bad conscience is a 'primary' perversion of will-to-power constituting our being, but that slave morality is a 'secondary' perversion of this which it is possible to resist and transform. And thus by allowing the possibility of critique, and hence overcoming, of

ressentiment, we then recover a sense in which our species history is still open and ‘living’. In brief, we recover a sense of man as not merely ‘having’ a genesis but of *being* this genesis as a process of continual becoming. And consequently in this way, by overcoming the humanist view of man’s phylogenesis, we hope to develop the concrete meaning of non-humanist existentialism. That is, we hope to reveal a deeper sense in which man *as* becoming is the meaning of man as perverse relation to alterity, and hence man as other than subject-entity.

A. Introduction: *Existentialism, becoming and ‘history’*

Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman- a rope over an abyss. A dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and staying-still. What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what can be loved in man is that he is a *going-across* and a *down-going*.

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Prologue: SS4¹

In our discussion of the free spirit we found that man can be understood *as* becoming. For, we saw man there not as a substantial subject but as a ‘fluid’ being disclosed in those transformative possibilities realised by the *Freigeist*. That is, we saw, as Jaspers says, ‘*Man as Basically Alterable*. That man is the animal ‘that is still not fixated.’’² Furthermore, it was in this sense that we lent concrete form to our thesis regarding perversity. This is because, continuing, we showed that the meaning of man as a perverse relation is man *as* genesis. In other words, we saw that it is by looking at man’s possibilities for transformation that his being *as* a perversion of prior natural forces is revealed. And in turn, it is this which allows us to give form to a philosophy of man which escapes the isolated subject-entity of humanism. However, it is also apparent that discussion of the free spirit can only take us so far in this regard. For if Nietzsche’s non-humanist existentialism is premised on an understanding of man *as* a ‘bridge’, as an emergence from natural forces, then an account of the *Freigeist* gives

¹ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* trans. by R.J Hollingdale [London: Penguin, 1961],

² K. Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An introduction to the understanding of his philosophical activity*, trans. by C.F. Wallraff, and F.J. Schmitz [Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997] p131

us only a relatively ‘individual’ sense of this process. That is to say, our discussion of the free spirit involves only a localised sense of perversion pertaining largely to individual experiences of self-overcoming. And as such this means that if we wish to grasp more fundamentally man *as* genesis, and hence as a perverse relation, we must look to a broader *species* mode of becoming. In brief then, if we wish to develop Nietzsche’s non-humanist conception of man, we must look to the perverse development and origins of the human species as a whole.

How specifically though are we to do this? Well we must, as Schacht says, look at ‘the historical transformation of our initial merely natural existence into our present humanity.’³ And for Nietzsche this means exploring that which he sees as essential to this process: the genealogy of moral values. That is, it means looking at the process by which man’s species defining capacity to forge values emerged. Yet, as we saw with the free spirit, we find that this development has typically been interpreted in a humanist fashion. In other words, we find this species past is regarded as the static ‘property’ of a subject-entity. In short, as something man ‘has’ but which is not essentially what he *is*. And if true this would have significant consequences for our discussion. For it would mean man’s phylogenesis has no bearing on his lived existence, and hence cannot contribute to any sense of man *as* becoming. Consequently then in order to recover a distinctive existential sense of our relation to species history, and our being as a process of ongoing becoming, we must confront this view. That is to say, we must explore the ‘humanist’, commonsensical view in more depth, and by doing so disclose a way to overcome it. For it is only in this way that we will see more fully the meaning of man *as* genesis and hence the meaning of man as perverse relation to alterity.

B. The humanist perspective: *an overview*

But continuing then, what exactly is this humanist view of phylogenesis which will allow us to do this? And how can it be overcome? Addressing the former question first we can say this is answered by looking at the dominant interpretations of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy*. That is, we will answer this question by exploring the humanist interpretations of the text where he most systematically discusses man’s origins. For we can say it will be in

³ R. Schacht, *Making Sense of Nietzsche: Reflections Timely and Untimely* [Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995], p206

confrontation with these readings that we can develop an alternative *existential* view of man's species past. Yet in what sense, to start, can these dominant readings be described as 'humanist? The answer we will argue hinges on the notion of critique. For not only does Nietzsche subtitle the *Genealogy* 'a polemic', but the absence of critique makes a non-humanist reading of man's phylogenesis impossible. In other words, we can concur with Nietzsche in saying that 'much more important than the nature of hypotheses, on the origin of morality...was a question of the *value* of morality.'⁴ And the reason why this is the case is because without the possibility of critique and hence possible transformation man's genesis becomes merely a settled object of history. Put differently, if everything in man's species past is *necessary* to what he is, and hence cannot be critiqued or changed, then that past becomes merely a static 'property' of what we are. In short, without the genuine possibility of critique man's phylogenesis cannot be 'at stake' in us, cannot be a living and integral aspect of our existence. And this would mean that our awareness of our species past could no longer contribute to any sense of ourselves *as* a process of continual becoming.

Moreover, in turn, the underlying reason why these readings are unable to offer a genuine critique, and hence remain humanist, is suggested by Nietzsche in a key section of *the Genealogy*. For adopting the persona of a hypothetical 'free thinker's' view of the slave revolt in values he asks,

But why do you talk about *nobler* ideals! Let's bow to the facts: the people have won- or 'the slaves', the 'plebians', 'the herd', or whatever you want to call them- if the Jews made this come about, good for them! No people ever had a more world-historic mission. 'The Masters' are deposed; the morality of the common people has triumphed. You might take this victory for blood-poisoning...I do not deny it; but undoubtedly this intoxication has *succeeded*. The 'salvation' of the human race [I mean, from 'the Masters'] is well on course; everything is being made appreciably Jewish, Christian or plebeian [never mind the words!]. The passage of this poison through the whole body of mankind seems unstoppable...⁵

⁴ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* trans. by C. Diethe [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994]: Preface, SS5. See also F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* trans. by J. Nauckhoff [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001]: SS345 'Morality as a problem': Nietzsche asserts that the distinctiveness of his task consists in giving a 'critique' of morality, something which has never been done before.

⁵ *GM*: I: SS9

In other words, the problem with the ‘free thinker’ is that he views the slave revolt as entirely necessary. For this revolt, which is inextricably linked to man’s phylogenesis, is seen as inescapable, meaning that ‘talk about nobler values’ and hence critique also, becomes futile. And, continuing, it is this same attitude which underpins most readings of the *Genealogy*. For it is this belief that the slave revolt is simply part of what makes man man, and hence cannot be changed, which forestalls any genuine possibility there of a real critique.

In particular, Janaway is representative of this view when he argues that ‘The historical shifts Nietzsche locates constituted clear progress beyond what went before.’⁶ This is because he suggests in this way that the slave revolt was entirely necessary to man becoming a distinctive and ‘interesting’ animal. Likewise, Ridley is typical of the literature in arguing that slave morality was in many ways ambivalent, or even positive. And this is a point that is made similarly by rejecting as impossible any earlier values, and with the claim that ‘any reversion to the unfathomably shallow stupidity of the original noble is out of the question.’⁷ Furthermore, this idea of such necessity is rooted in an identification of the slaves with some broad notion of ‘internalisation’. For as Ridley argues of the slaves, ‘Their instincts are denied natural outlet, their natural physicality denied expression. They become repressed; they turn in on themselves and develop an inner life, a soul, on which they can vent all their aggression and cruelty.’⁸ Thus the slave revolt is set in contrast to what Mulhall calls the ‘wholly spontaneous instinctual life’⁹ of the noble, for whom ‘there is no hiatus between conceiving a desire and acting to satisfy it.’¹⁰ And further in this way the revolt is identified with ‘anything resembling human subjectivity as such’.¹¹ In other words, the slave revolt is seen as necessary to distinguishing man from ‘a stage of human pre-history, a kind of animality’¹² that we find with the nobles.

Consequently continuing, even where the importance of critique *is* acknowledged in Nietzsche it is viewed as impossible or utopian.¹³ That is, he is seen to identify moralities

⁶ C. Janaway, *Beyond Selflessness* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], p247

⁷ A. Ridley, *Nietzsche’s Conscience* [London: Cornell University Press, 1998], p133. See also D. Conway, *Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morals* [London: Continuum, 2008] for a similar view of the slave revolt as ambivalent or positive.

⁸ Ridley, p8

⁹ S. Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005], p41-42

¹⁰ Ibid p41-42

¹¹ Mulhall, p41

¹² Mulhall, p42: Something which Mulhall also identifies with the pre-lapsarian state, thus making Nietzsche’s account a retelling of the myth of the fall.

¹³ A variety of ideas in the Nietzsche literature have developed regarding what ultimately Nietzsche sees as wrong with morality. Owen, *Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morality* [Stocksfield: Acumen, 2007] for instance bases his interpretation on a distinction between the expression of power and the feeling of power. As he says, ‘The criterion of evaluation that Nietzsche proposes is whether the feeling of power expresses and tracks power’

problem as being a lamentable repression of instincts manifest in the slaves, but he cannot meaningfully suggest how this might be overcome. And in this way these readings too are unable to develop a genuine sense of critique or avoid being humanist. Yet if true where does all this then leave our overall argument? Where does this leave our claim that by looking at these humanist readings we can develop an alternative *existential* understanding of man's relation to phylogenesis, and hence of man *as* genesis? Well, the answer lies in seeing what is necessary to overcome these humanist positions. Specifically, the answer lies in seeing what is necessary to escape the forestalling of critique we find in them, and what it is that leads to this forestalling. And the way to achieve this is gestured towards by Clark. For, she points out that Nietzsche's concept of morality, at the heart of man's phylogenesis, does not represent a single indivisible whole. Rather, as she says, morality is 'an extremely complex affair that developed in the course of human history through the multiple coupling of originally separate strands that we can no longer see as independent.'¹⁴ And this is a point that goes against the dominant humanist readings of *The Genealogy*. For underpinning the belief that the developments in man's phylogenesis are all necessary and hence cannot be critiqued, is a sense that they all refer back to the same basic phenomenon.

In particular, to explain, we are referring to what Nietzsche calls 'the internalisation of man.'¹⁵ For, although Nietzsche's *Genealogy* discusses an ostensibly different phenomenon in the case of 'bad conscience' in the second essay, this is typically viewed as an extension of the instinctual repression introduced in the first. In short, that process described there whereby man's confinement in the state turns his instincts back against himself, is viewed as an elaboration of the repression constitutive of the slave revolt. And indeed as Metzger says, paraphrasing this view, 'what Nietzsche describes in the Second

[p35]. And on this view the failing of slave morality is that its 'feeling of power' does not reflect its actual, limited, power.

Likewise Danto, A. Danto, 'Some Remarks on The Genealogy of Morals' in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality* ed. R. Schacht [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994], argues that Nietzsche's objection to morality is that it increases human suffering by adding 'intensional suffering' to 'extensional suffering' [p42]. In other words morality adds to the brute fact of suffering, 'extensional suffering', by an interpretation of that suffering which causes more misery as a result, 'intensional suffering'. Slightly differently Foot, 'Nietzsche's Immoralism', in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, viewing the problem in a more analytic vein, finds that all of Nietzsche's reasons for criticising morality are weak.

Additionally Leiter, B. Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* [London: Routledge, 2002], suggests that Nietzsche's critique of morality centres on the fact that it hinders the specific production of 'higher men.' [p155] However, Leiter divides this suggestion from his actual exegesis of *the Genealogy*, and therefore does not show how it is rooted in Nietzsche's account of man's phylogenesis.

¹⁴M. Clark, 'Nietzsche's Immoralism and the Concept of Morality', in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, p31

¹⁵ *GM*: II: 16

Essay as the bad conscience is, in its essence, another manifestation of *ressentiment*.¹⁶ As such, continuing we can from this identify a fundamental root of the humanist readings, and their forestalling of critique. For the reason they view all aspects of man's phylogenesis as necessary, and therefore not transformable, is that they do not essentially distinguish between the two fundamental processes at work in *The Genealogy*.

In other words, the reason they cannot offer a genuine critique is that they fail to distinguish between the instinctual repression necessary for man to transcend animal existence, and the slave *ressentiment* Nietzsche wants to condemn. And it is in this way therefore that a path toward a non-humanist reading we can see is indicated. This is because if the essential problem with the humanist reading is that it conflates the two processes in the *Genealogy*, then we may overcome this by properly separating bad conscience and the slave revolt described there. That is, we may overcome it by showing, as Metzger says, that 'the bad conscience is not an instance or effect of *ressentiment*, and the second essay is not a further exploration of *ressentiment*.'¹⁷ For if we can grasp this distinction then all aspects of man's phylogenesis are no longer necessary for man. And hence if this is the case we see how critique, transformation, and a non-humanist reading of man's origins is possible, and hence how we might further understand man *as becoming*.

¹⁶ J. Metzger, 'How deep are the roots of nihilism' in *Nietzsche, Nihilism and the Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Jeffrey Metzger [London: Continuum, 2009], p135. We see this view of bad-conscience and the unity of the two essays more generally in a number of commentators. For instance Leiter argues p135, that the different essays represent progressively 'deeper' levels of *ressentiment*. And most take Nietzsche's critique of morality to be of a single unified phenomenon incorporating both bad conscience and the slave revolt. In this respect Deleuze, G. Deleuze *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson [London: Continuum, 2006] is also symptomatic. For he argues, in relation to bad conscience that 'Being interiorised, being turned back against itself-this is the way in which active force becomes truly reactive' [p119]. Thus he conflates the 'interiorisation' of bad conscience with the re-active process of the slave revolt. And again, when Ridley says that 'The slave's instincts have all been turned inward, repressed' p41, he runs together the internalisation, which is bad conscience, with the slave and his *ressentiment*.

¹⁷ Metzger, p136

C. Bad conscience: *primary perversion*

[i] *Origins of Bad conscience: the 'state of nature'*

But how, specifically are we to accomplish this? How are we to distinguish between the necessary and the contingent in man's development, and thus pave the way for a non-humanist, *existential* understanding of his species past? The answer is that we start by looking at the phenomenon of bad conscience discussed in the second essay. That is, we start with that essay where, as Ansell-Pearson notes, Nietzsche is 'concerned with nothing less than the evolution of the human mind and how its basic ways of thinking have come into being'.¹⁸ In particular we need to show there that bad conscience is a primary perversion of natural forces that is constitutive of our being. In this way we need to show that the internalisation necessary to man's 'inner life', and distinctive capacity to create values, is exclusive to this phenomenon. And furthermore, in showing how this process, according to Nietzsche, is 'positive', we need to explain how it cannot be the object of his critique. Consequently then, by doing this we can begin to address our overall concern. For in so doing we pave the way for an understanding of the slave revolt as a 'secondary perversion' of an initial founding perversity and hence as something that is not necessary. That is to say, by showing slave morality as a secondary perversion of a more basic process we can understand how this second aspect of man's phylogenesis can be resisted and transformed. And, again to return to our general point, by thus allowing for meaningful critique, we can show man's species past is still 'open', 'at stake', and can contribute to a sense of man *as* genesis.

Yet continuing, how are we to begin this task? How are we to show firstly that the emergence of 'bad conscience' represents a 'primary perversion' constituting man's being? We begin by observing that for Nietzsche, like Freud and Rousseau, it was man's integration into organised, non-familial, social structures which distinguished him from the animal.¹⁹ That is, as Maurice Cranston has noted, paraphrasing Rousseau, 'it is only by coming into a political society that he becomes 'an intelligent being and a man.''^{20,21} And likewise, this view is mirrored in *The Genealogy*. For there Nietzsche talks about man prior to his existence

¹⁸ K. Ansell-Pearson, 'Introduction: on Nietzsche's critique of morality', in *GM*, pxxii

¹⁹ Perhaps the most significant aspect of 'organised social structures' was the existence of an abstract law regulating behaviour between human beings outside the bonds of genetics, that is, the 'family'. As such, the abstract demand to 'love thy neighbour', can be seen, as Freud observes, as the defining command of civilization.

²⁰ M. Cranston, 'Introduction' in J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. by M. Cranston [London: Penguin, 1968], p28

²¹ See Mulhall, p41-42

in the early state as a 'semi-animal', describing 'that change whereby he finally found himself imprisoned within the confines of society and peace' as 'the most fundamental of all changes he experienced.'²² However, if it is subjection to a social existence transcending either the personal or the genetic that is held to be decisive for the development of 'man', we are now entitled to ask what is particularly 'perverse' about this. In other words, we are obliged to ask what is 'perverse', or 'perverting', about man's entry into the state, and what this has to do with bad conscience. And it is as such to address these questions that we must next examine the nature of man's existence prior to his confinement within this structure.

To continue then, we grasp how man's confinement in society could be perverting, if we understand the prior state which was supposed to have been 'perverted' by it. But what was this initial state? In simple terms we can say, following Freud, that it was of one of 'instinctual freedom', one in the case of man of 'knowing no restrictions of instinct.'²³ Put differently, this state was one of the unrestrained expression of desire, especially where this concerned other human beings. And it is this last point, which led Freud also to conclude, along with others in the history of philosophy, that in the state of nature 'man is a wolf to man.'²⁴ In brief it led him to conclude that there man's freedom of instinct will lead him to attack and abuse other human beings. Yet why in turn would instinctual freedom necessarily lead to such a state of social antagonism? One obvious answer would be that man was driven to it by his 'natural' instincts of self-interest and preservation. That is, as Hobbes argues in *Leviathan*,²⁵ in a view to some extent shared by Rousseau, it is man's desire for personal gain and safety which causes him to wage war against his fellow man. In other words, in the pre-political state he would pursue aggression against others to defend himself and what he has from attack, and then actively to seize what he lacks.²⁶

Nietzsche and Freud, however, have a more disturbing explanation for this state of affairs. And this is one that allows us to understand why they see man's integration into the state as perverse. That is, for both, man's rapaciousness towards man in the state of nature is not the contingent by-product of self-interest caused by scarcity and insecurity, but the expression of a more fundamental instinct of aggression within nature. And for Nietzsche this is framed in terms of 'the will to power'. For as he says, criticising the notion of life as self-

²² *GM*: II: SS16

²³ S. Freud, 'Civilization and its Discontents', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XXI*, trans. by J. Strachey [London: Vintage, 1964], Part V, p115 [Hereafter *CD*].

²⁴ *Ibid*, Part V, p111, '*Homo homini lupus*', 'Man is a wolf to man.' Derived from Plautus, *Asinaria* II, iv, 88

²⁵ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* trans. by J.C Gaskin [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996], Part I: 'Of man'

²⁶ See also Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Chapter 2, p50: 'Man's first law is to watch over his own preservation; his first care he owes to himself.'

interested adaptation, 'adaptation'...is a second-rate activity, just a re-activity, indeed, life itself has been defined as an increasingly efficient adaptation to external circumstances [Herbert Spencer].²⁷ Rather, as he goes on to say, '...this is to misunderstand the essence of life, its *will to power*, we overlook the prime importance that the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, re-interpreting, re-directing and formative forces have, which 'adaptation' follows only when they have had their effect.'²⁷ In different words, for Nietzsche, aggression in the state of nature was primary. That is, it could not have been the adaptive or evolutionary by-product of an underlying instinct of self-preservation or survival. On the contrary rather, life itself was inherently 'aggressive', seeking on an essential level to impose itself on the world, to 'leave its mark', by conquering, and transforming other resisting forces. And it is this 'aggressive' instinct as such which then is manifest in the pre-political life of the human.

Continuing as such, we can see that it is the will-to-power's nature which explains why prior to the state 'man is a wolf to man', and *what* it is then which might be perverted by the state. For, expressed initially in the human, this will-to-power manifests itself, as Nietzsche says, in 'Animosity, cruelty, the pleasure of pursuing, raiding, changing and destroying...'²⁸ That is, put more explicitly by Freud, this is the desire in relation to ones neighbour '...to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him.'²⁹ And it is this which, to answer our earlier question, explains the nature of man's existence in his pre-political state. However, we can now ask, how does this relate then to man becoming 'perverted' by the movement away from all this? In other words, if man in the state of nature is as we have described him then how is this creature made perverse by his transition to life outside of that? In short, how is 'the wild, free, roving man'³⁰ perverted by his movement to life inside the state? It is to answer these questions that we must now examine a further process. That is, we must now examine the process by which this 'most fundamental of all changes' for man first took place. For, if we cannot show how on Nietzsche's account a transition to the state occurred, a perverse view of man here might have to be abandoned. In other words, without explaining how, given his view of the state of nature, this change was possible, we cannot continue our account of this development as 'perverting'. And it is to explore this point then that we begin by looking at the standard view of this transition.

²⁷ *GM*: II: SS12

²⁸ *GM*: II: SS16

²⁹ Freud, *CD* :Part V, p111

³⁰ *GM*: II: SS16

[ii] Origins of bad conscience: 'blond beasts' and transition to the state

As such, we begin by observing that on the standard view an account of this transition is not a problem. For this view, already touched on, is based on the assumption that man's primary instinct is one of self-interest and preservation. And this does not present any intractable difficulties in explaining the state's origins. For, if we believe following Hobbes that social antagonism in the state of nature is merely the result of conflictual self-interest, then it is possible that self-interest may also dictate the state's creation. This is because, if man is fundamentally driven by self-interest, it follows that this may also lead him to sacrifice freedom of instinct for protection from others. Hence we have the idea of a 'social contract' or, as Nietzsche says, the 'fantasy' in relation to the state 'which has it begin with a 'contract''³¹. In short, we have a situation where the state, a set-up where man submits to a law transcending immediate self-interest, emerges out of an instinct of enlightened self-interest. However, if this view is thus relatively unproblematic it also one which Nietzsche rejects. Further it is one which implies nothing necessarily perverse about man's transition to the state. For if we create the state in this way then our fundamental instinct of self-interest is not there really 'perverted', but simply given a more rational and less immediate form. That is, we sacrifice the total freedom of desire in the moment for the longer term possibility of a secure and peaceable existence. And moreover, this implies that man in the state does not then represent a perversion of animal nature, but simply a higher form of it.

Consequently, if we wish to understand man as perverse we must move away from this idea. In other words, we must move away from the notion that enlightened self-interest and the social contract created the state. Instead we must use the starting point already outlined of the will-to-power, and the idea, as Freud puts it, that 'the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man.'³² For if the will to dominate and overcome, and not self-interest, is man's primary instinct then this would imply something potentially perverse about man's existence in the state. That is, if 'aggression' were primary then unlike self-interest it would not be straightforwardly compatible with organised social existence. In short, unlike self-interest, which is continued through the state, the external expression of aggression would by necessity be rendered impossible there. And thus denied

³¹ *GM*: II: SS17

³² *CD*: Part VI, p122, note, Nietzsche and Freud held different views on *why* this independent instinct existed. For Nietzsche this was an expression of the Will-to-power, whereas for Freud it was an externalisation of the 'Death drive'.

altogether, but still inescapable, this might set up the possibility for man being rendered perverse by his movement to the state.

Yet returning to our question, it is apparent that this possibility also comes with a new problem. For if the standard view of the state's inception was non-problematic but non-perverse, then Nietzsche's view is potentially perverse but also problematic. That is, it points the way toward man as 'perverse' but only at the cost of making this inception seem opaque. And this is because if nature is circumscribed by an aggressive will-to-power, then this raises an apparent paradox. In different words, it raises the question of how such a fundamental instinct could ever contrive a situation whereby, with the state, it wilfully denied itself. And, again looking back, it is this problem we must address if we are to continue our account of man as perverse. But how are we to do this? We begin by noting that Nietzsche's 'solution' to this problem regarding the will-to-power on one level mirrors that adopted by social contract theorists. This is because, just as for them, it was an enlightened form of self-interest that overcame conflictual self-interest, likewise for Nietzsche it is a higher quantity of power-will that instigates its own overcoming. And this manifests itself first of all controversially, in what he calls 'the blond beasts.'³³ For, as he says, the state originated initially in '...some pack of blond beasts of prey, a conqueror and master race, which, organised on a war footing, and with the power to organise, unscrupulously lays its dreadful paws on a populace.'³⁴ In other words, it was groups of humans invested with great will-to-power who were responsible for the state. That is, it was humans with an exceptional ability to mould to their will their fellow man which led to the outward restriction of the will-to-power in others. And it is Nietzsche's description of the blond beasts in this way then which begins to explain how he can account for the state's origins.

However, more must be said about the nature of the blond beasts if we are properly to understand this process. For some commentators have argued like Owen, that here 'Nietzsche has boxed himself into something of a corner.'³⁵ That is, they question how the 'beasts of prey' could have imposed organisation on other human beings without themselves having been subject to the internalisation and organising force they are supposed to explain. And it is to address these concerns that we must now look more closely at the nature of the former's 'higher' will-to-power. This is because in the case of the will-to-power, as Metzger points

³³ *GM*: II: SS17

³⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵ Owen, p104. That is, the blond beast must have been subject to internalisation in order to organise and bring the state into being

out, 'the active force Nietzsche is describing is form giving and artistic, not merely violent.'³⁶ In other words, contradicting Janaway, for whom we have 'a fundamental need to inflict *cruelty*'³⁷, we see that the will-to-power is not reducible to the desire to inflict *external* violence on another. Rather, in higher forms its 'violence' is more fundamental, subtle and creative than simple destruction. And this is significant because it offers a key to understanding how the higher will-to-power of the blond beasts was able to create the state. For as Nietzsche says, 'the oldest 'state' emerged as a terrible tyranny, as a repressive and ruthless machinery, and continued working until the raw material of people and semi-animals had been finally not just kneaded and made compliant, but *shaped*.'³⁸

In other words, whilst physical violence was part of what was imposed, there was a more fundamental 'violence' at work. And this involved not merely killing or enslaving the subject populations but unconsciously trying to organise and transform them. And this is a point again made clear in Nietzsche's description of the blond beast's activity. This is because, as he says, 'What they do is to create and imprint forms instinctively, they are the most involuntary, unconscious artists there are: -where they appear, soon something new arises.'³⁹ And as such in this way, we see how the state is formed by the higher will-to-power of the blond beasts. That is to say, if the power-will is 'artistic' in its violence, aiming to imprint organisation on unformed matter, then its higher expressions could aim at the moulding of the other that occurs with the state. For if these 'beasts' sought to inflict upon man 'the pressure of their hammer blows and artists' violence'⁴⁰, then what more brutal way would there be than to force restrictions on his essential instincts? That is, what better expression of their will-to-power would there be than this attempted transformation of his essential conditions of existence?

Consequently in this way we have seen how a 'higher' mode of violence could give rise to the state. And continuing at the same time we have addressed the concerns raised with regards to the blond beasts and the apparent paradox of Nietzsche's account of the state. That is, by exploring the blond beast's greater power-will we have seen how the will-to-power could create something which seemed to restrict that very instinct. For if the aggression of will-to-power is ultimately the desire to transform the other then this power could find highest expression in the radical alteration of man's conditions of existence. In short, it could

³⁶ Metzger, p138

³⁷ Janaway, p124

³⁸ *GM:II*: SS17

³⁹ *Ibid*

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

find greatest satisfaction in the forcible suspension in man of ‘all the old instincts on which, up till then, his strength, pleasure and formidableness had been based.’⁴¹ And thus in this sense it is the power-will’s own ‘perverse’ nature which explains how it can turn against itself. For the will-to-power’s striving to overcome resistance paradoxically leads it to overcome and transform its own unrestrained expression existing in the state of nature. And it is this point, in turn, which addresses our previous question. That is, this point explains how a transition to the state based on the premise of will-to-power is possible, and thus how a perverse account of man’s development can be meaningfully continued.

However, if we have therefore seen how a potentially perverse account of man can make sense of the state’s inception we are still left with further questions.⁴² Above all we are left with the question of how the animal ‘man’ is thus perverted by his transition to organised society. For did we not say that by looking at man’s pre-political existence, and then the process of his movement away from this, that we could understand how such a change was perverse? And therefore did we not say also that we would thus be able to understand how his confinement in the state might represent a primary perversion constituting man’s being? Thus far it seems we have still only been building the foundations for an answer to these questions. That is, we have seen how with the creation of the state by the blond beasts something terrible, and potentially perverse, was inflicted on the previously ‘free’ animals of the pre-political state. Further, we have seen how this is linked to the nature of the will-to-power itself. For as witnessed by the actions of the blond beasts, in attempting to mould subject populations the power-will turns against and transforms itself. In short, it perversely turns against its own unrestrained expression existing in the state of nature. Yet we have not yet discussed fully what the *effect* of this perverse effort by these ‘artists of violence’⁴³ was. In other words, we have not yet discussed the impact of this act of violence on its victims, nor how *their* previously unrestrained will-to-power was affected by this experiment. That is, we have not yet seen how the subject populations were transformed by the experiment of forcibly restraining that instinct in the state. And it is to this question then, of the effect of the will-to-power’s obstruction, and with it the next step in answering our questions concerning primary perversity, that we now turn.

⁴¹ *GM:II: SS17*

⁴² Note criticisms of the ‘blond beast’ narrative by both Kaufmann and Metzger. In the latter case Nietzsche’s argument is held to be circular because the blond beasts required ‘organisation’ in order to organise others. Note also, Freud’s explanation for the origins of the state linked to patricide, in the primal horde, see *CD: VII, p131-132*.

⁴³ *GM: II: SS18*

[iii] Perverse effect of the state: ‘internalisation’ and the possibility of value creation

But what, we can ask, was that effect? What was the effect for the animal ‘man’ of ‘that change whereby he finally found himself imprisoned within the confines of society and peace’⁴⁴ and his old instincts restricted? The first thing to note would be that the principal effect here was not the re-direction of these instincts *against* the creators of the state. This is because, as Nietzsche argues, the nature and extremity of their actions was simply too momentous to allow this to happen. That is, because ‘the alteration was not gradual and voluntary... but was a breach, a leap, a compulsion, an inescapable fate that nothing could ward off...’ then it ‘occasioned no struggle, not even any *ressentiment*.’⁴⁵ And this meant no hatred was possible. For hate requires some understanding of what the other did. Yet this action by the blond beasts is so unprecedented and ‘other’, that it and its perpetrators cannot be comprehended, and therefore not hated. However, whilst the instincts of man were thus not turned into externally directed hatred, at the same time, as Nietzsche observes, ‘the old instincts had not suddenly ceased to make their demands.’⁴⁶ In other words, contradicting what the liberal social contract theory narrative would predict, the aggressive instincts did not vanish either. For, this would occur only if aggression were a function of scarcity or insecurity in the state of nature and hence could be eliminated with the latter. But of course this would make no difference if it was, as for Nietzsche, part of an innate drive.

So then what did happen to these instincts which now could no longer express themselves externally, in the old way? Nietzsche’s answer is both radical and simple.⁴⁷ As he says, ‘Those terrible bulwarks with which state organisations protected themselves against the old instincts of freedom...had the result that all those instincts of the wild, free, roving man were turned backwards, *against man himself*.’⁴⁸ In other words, as Freud puts it, deprived of external expression, ‘His aggressiveness is introjected, internalised; it is, in point of fact, sent back to where it came from-.’⁴⁹ And it is *this* perverse process, turning to the issue at the heart of our enquiry, which is responsible for the creation of ‘bad conscience’. In short, it is what Nietzsche calls ‘the *internalisation* of man’⁵⁰, which represents the primary perversion responsible for constituting man’s distinctive being. Yet, of course, this still leaves several critical questions unanswered. That is, firstly it leaves the question of why what

⁴⁴ *GM*: II: SS16

⁴⁵ *GM*: II: SS17

⁴⁶ *GM*: II: SS16

⁴⁷ See also *CD*, p123

⁴⁸ *GM*: II: SS16

⁴⁹ *CD*, Part VII, p123

⁵⁰ *GM*: II: SS16

Nietzsche calls 'bad conscience' is fundamentally constitutive of man's being *as man*. And second it still leaves the question of *how* exactly this constituting phenomenon emerges from the process of 'internalisation'.

As such, we begin to answer these questions by suggesting provisionally that bad conscience is constitutive of man's being because it is tied to value. That is, conscience is significant because it is bound up with man's defining capacity to *create values*. And although this link will become more apparent as we continue, it is therefore the question of how internalisation leads to the creation of values or ideals at which we will first look. And in turn, we will begin to understand how this occurs by recalling the nature of the instinct to be 'introjected'. That is, we begin to understand how internalisation of instinct allows for bad conscience and value creation, if we recall that what is being now directed against the self is the will-to-power. For, we can recall that this will-to-power above all is, as Nietzsche says, 'aggressive, expansive, re-interpreting, re-directing and formative.'⁵¹ In short, it is above all the fundamental drive to impose the organism's will by *transforming* the world around it. And looking back again, further, we can see how it achieves this. It does so that is, as witnessed with the blond beasts, through destruction and *negation*; through the power of 'Animosity, cruelty, the pleasure of pursuing, raiding, changing and destroying...'⁵² In other words, the will is branded on something in the outside world by the forcible destruction of what it was before. And this was exactly what we saw 'on a grand scale in those artists of violence and organisers.'⁵³ For their creation of the state *was* essentially the violent destruction of the old ways of life, and the violent suppression of the subject people's existing instincts.

But then, how does this help us address how value creation emerged from perverse internalisation? Well, we can say that if the will-to-power is as described then turned inward it must also seek to impose its will, and transform its object, through a negating destruction. Yet it should also be apparent that in the case of the self it cannot straightforwardly, or in a *real* way, do this. That is, it cannot express itself on the self in terms of a *physical* negation or destruction because the 'self' is not a physical object. Therefore, since it cannot enforce a physical negation in this case, it creates a *psychic* one. And this psychic negation, the power-will's imaginative destruction applied to the self, takes the form of an imagined self-negation. In short, it takes the form of a sense of absence or lack in relation to one's own self. As

⁵¹ *GM*: II: SS12

⁵² *GM*: II: SS16

⁵³ *GM*: II: SS18

Nietzsche says, explaining, ‘this artist’s cruelty, this desire to give form to oneself as a piece of difficult, resisting, suffering matter...’ means ‘...to brand it with a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a ‘no’⁵⁴ In other words, the turning of the negating power-will against the ‘whole animal old self’,⁵⁵ meant the birth of an imaginative ‘no’. That is, this attack on the self meant the birth of negativity in relation to one’s self, a sense that what existed there was somehow inadequate, deficient or lacking. And, as such, this self-violation implied the creation of ‘a soul voluntarily split within itself.’⁵⁶ In brief, the internalisation of the will-to-power meant an essential division within the self between what it *is* and a sense now of what it *is not*.

[iv] Development of internalisation: concrete value creation

Consequently continuing, from this it is clear how we have in part answered our previous questions. In other words, it is now apparent how the internalisation of the will-to-power as a transformative *negating* force leads to bad conscience and value creation. This is because, directed inwards, this negating power introduces an imaginary ‘no’ within the self, and hence opens up an essential division between what we are and what we might be.⁵⁷ In different words, with this division between a negative, non-present, ‘ideal’ self and the actual existing one, we have that persecuted sense of inadequacy before an ideal we know as ‘conscience’. That is, we have the phenomenon Freud defines as ‘The tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it.’⁵⁸ And we can also now with this see how bad conscience is bound up with man’s distinctive capacity to create values. For whether we agree with Freud’s formulation here, it is clear that conscience is irrevocably tied to the imagining of, and anxiety before, a value beyond what is given. However, that said, our understanding of this point is still incomplete. For we have been dealing here with the emergence of bad conscience from internalisation in only its most embryonic and abstract form, with the first ‘spark’ of conscience as it were. And as such it follows that in order to understand this process more completely we must look at how conscience and value creation

⁵⁴ *GM*: II: SS18

⁵⁵ *Ibid*

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷ See also *GM*: II: SS14: How bad conscience did not emerge from punishment

⁵⁸ *CD*: VII, p123

⁵⁹ See also H. Bergson, *The two sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. by R. Audra and C. Brereton [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977] Part One, ‘Moral obligation’, p9

develops fully from the original 'no'. In short we must look at how internalisation leads to a more concrete and specific kind of ideal.

But how are we to do this? We begin by noting that for Nietzsche, 'The whole inner world, originally stretched thinly as though between two layers of skin, was expanded and extended itself... in proportion to the degree that the external discharge of man's instincts was *obstructed*.'⁶⁰ In other words, man's 'inner world' of value, and specific value creation, expanded and flowered to the extent that internalisation was increased. And although Nietzsche is not entirely clear on *how* this process occurs we can nonetheless construct an argument here. That is, by following our earlier logic, and utilising Freud's insights on the subject, it is possible to construct an answer. For starting where we left off, with conscience in its embryonic state, we saw that internalised will-to-power had created a 'negation' in the self by causing a sense of deficiency with regards to the existing self. At first though, we can imagine this 'anxiety' is vague and objectless. Consequently, angst looks for an object. And as such it latches onto the fact that despite the prohibitions on the external expression of aggression the *intention* to express it still exists in the self. In other words, the basis for the feeling of inadequacy becomes a 'moral' sense that the intentions and *nature* of the self is flawed. That is, the intentions of the self are flawed since they exist in contradiction with what is demanded by external authorities. And this is the basis of the feeling that, as Freud puts it, 'even when a person has not actually *done* the bad thing but has only recognised in himself an *intention* to do it, he may regard himself as guilty.'⁶¹

Continuing therefore, what man's initial objectless bad conscience latches onto is that the self still wants to express the power-will externally.⁶² That is, the self still wants to do something in contradiction to what seems to be demanded. And this, we can say, allows us to see how from the initial abstract negation a concrete ideal and conscience develop. In short, the internalised will-to-power now creates the specific outline of man's capacity for value creation. For, from the conflict between my aggressive intentions and what is expected of my action, is set up a clear possibility which I am failing to live up to. That is, set up here is the outline for an ideal of concrete self-overcoming: the possibility of transforming and moulding my existing instincts and self. And it is in this way then that we can see how bad conscience

⁶⁰ *GM*: II: SS16

⁶¹ *CD*: VII, p124

⁶² See Janaway, Chapter 8: he tries identifying when a distinctive sense of guilt takes place. That is, guilt is held to differ from bad conscience in so far as it represents a universal sense of wrong-doing. See also Clark 'Nietzsche's immoralism and the concept of morality': it is this 'moralization' which is seen as the essential problem with bad conscience.

can be, as Nietzsche says the ‘true womb of ideal and imaginative events.’⁶³ However, to return, does this then answer our initial questions? Does this address the question of how bad conscience and man’s capacity to create values emerges from the internalisation of will-to-power? In a sense the answer is ‘yes’. For we have seen first how this internalisation leads to a negation in the self, and a sense of absence or lack which is the first spark of conscience. And continuing we next saw how this first abstract ‘spark’ finds concrete form, and can give birth to specific values. That is, we next saw through the conflict between the *intention* to express instincts externally and the demand that they are repressed, the concrete form given to conscience and value creation.

Moreover, we are now also in a position to address the second major question of this section. In other words, we can now address why Nietzsche considers the perversion of animal instincts which is ‘the *internalisation* of man’⁶⁴, to be that which fundamentally constitutes man *as man*. For it is with the emergence of bad conscience and the possibility of the ‘ideal’ from this, that is born at the same time that ‘whole inner world’⁶⁵ distinguishing him from the animal. That is to say, the birth of a capacity for value creation from internalisation is necessary for what Mulhall calls ‘any recognisable human subjectivity.’⁶⁶ This is because it is our ability to create values and envisage an ‘ideal’, which allows for a world of thought, imagination and value beyond what is physically and externally given. Put another way, it is our ability to escape simply what is found in the immediacy of instinct that fundamentally distinguishes us from the rest of nature. And it is in this sense then that the perversion of instinct with internalisation, and what follows from this, constitutes man as man. In short, it is because conscience and value, the products of internalisation, allow for the creation of ‘an inner as well as an outer life’⁶⁷, that this perversion is constitutive of man.

[v] Conclusion to Bad conscience section: ‘primary perversion’

Yet where does this leave our argument overall? Where does this leave our claims regarding man *as* becoming, this as the meaning of man as a perverse relation, and hence the development of a non-humanist existentialism? Well, we began by saying that we could fully understand man as genesis, and hence man *as* a perverse relation to natural forces, only if we

⁶³ *GM*: II: SS18

⁶⁴ *GM*: II: SS16

⁶⁵ *Ibid*

⁶⁶ Mulhall, p41

⁶⁷ *Ibid*

gave a non-humanist, *existential*, account of man's species origins. That is, we said we could give a proper account of man as genesis, only if we countered the dominant humanist view of man's origins and of *The Genealogy*. For this view suggested that man's species development was something he 'had' as a property, but was not something he *was*, and hence was not something that could contribute to understanding man *as* becoming. And in turn we argued this was held to be the case, in particular in relation to *The Genealogy*, because these readings saw that all aspects of man's phylogenesis were unavoidable. In other words, seeing both bad conscience and the slave revolt as bound up with necessary internalisation, they forestalled the possibility of any critique. And continuing, in this way, they then also forestalled the possibility of transformation and therefore of our past development as being 'at stake' in our existence. Consequently in order to counter this view, and allow for an understanding of man *as* his genesis, as a process of continual becoming, we had to counter the idea of that necessity. That is to say, we had to distinguish between two processes at work in *the Genealogy* and suggest that only one was necessary for man.

As such, then, we followed Metzger in suggesting that 'the bad conscience is not an instance or effect of resentment, and the second essay is not a further exploration of resentment.'⁶⁸ However, we differed from Metzger in our method for doing so. For, we proposed to separate a necessary bad conscience from a contingent, and thus transformable, slave morality by appeal to the idea of perversity. That is to say, we proposed to distinguish between them by suggesting that bad conscience is a 'primary' perversion constituting man's being, and that the slave revolt is a 'secondary' perversion of that more basic process. And in so doing we hoped to show that whilst the former is necessary for man the latter is contingent and therefore amenable to transformation. But have we been successful in demonstrating this? Well, first of all we attempted to be so by focusing on the 'primary perversion' in man's phylogenesis. As such we attempted to show that the process described in the *Genealogies* second essay represents a founding perversion which necessarily constitutes man as man. And we did so, in turn, first of all by looking at the state. For, we said that man's transition to organised social life constituted perhaps the most decisive moment in his development. In short we had to see how with the state 'the whole character of the world changed in an essential way.'⁶⁹ And continuing therefore we set out to show how this change could be considered 'perverse'.

⁶⁸ Metzger, p136

⁶⁹ *GM*: II: SS16

Moreover, we did this first of all by looking at the ‘state of nature’, that place where man possessed ‘the innocent conscience of the wild beast.’⁷⁰ For whether or not the transition to the state could be considered perverse depended on our interpretation of the instincts which were free there. So, with Rousseau and Hobbes this ‘instinct’ was merely self-interest and preservation. As such, on that liberal view, the movement to the state need occasion no perversity, but a rational realisation of higher self-interest. In contrast, for Nietzsche, it was will-to-power, as an inherently aggressive force, which defined the state of nature. And we said, conversely the suppression of instinct in the state there would occasion something ‘perverse’ since such an instinct was not openly compatible with social existence. However, we also went on to argue that this potentially ‘perverse’ view of the state also for that reason presented a unique problem. That is to say, that whilst the liberal, non-perverse view of man’s instincts, had no difficulties in explaining the transition to the state, via enlightened self-interest, the perverse view did. For in that case it was unclear by what reason an instinct so antithetical to restriction could ever wilfully place the constraint on itself that is the state. And it was thus to address this problem, and preserve the possibility of man as perverse, that we appealed to ‘the blond beasts.’⁷¹ In other words, we appealed to a group with an exceptional will to power to explain here the state’s origins. For, against Janaway and others, we argued that will-to-power in its higher forms was not merely destructive but creative and transformative. And, continuing, we argued that therefore the state could emerge as the ultimate ‘creative’ form of violence, imposed by the higher power-will of the blond beasts. In short, we said that paradoxically the highest form of violence against men would be a structure which restricted in them the expression of their most basic, violent, drives.

Consequently we saw how a potentially perverse view of man, centred on will-to-power, could account for the emergence of the state. Yet to address our central concern, we had then fully to explain how the restriction of the power-will in the state represented a primary ‘perversion’, and how this perversion was essentially constitutive of man *as man*. And we did this by looking at what we called ‘internalisation.’ For when the power-will was prevented by the state from expressing itself internally this ‘had the result that all those instincts of the wild, free, roving man were turned backwards, *against man himself*.’⁷² In other words, the will-to-power now brought its negating destruction to bear on the self, creating a sense that it is somehow inadequate or lacking. And further, as we also saw, this

⁷⁰ GM: I: SS11

⁷¹ GM: II: SS17

⁷² GM: II: SS16

objectless sense of anxiety or negativity was then given concrete form. That is, it was given specific form by the conflict between the *intention* to express instincts externally and the demand that they are repressed, and thus the ideal that our existing self should be overcome. Continuing as such we saw how man's transition to the state can be understood as a fundamental perversion, a turning against itself, of his basic animal nature. And moreover, we also saw how such a perversion is constitutive and 'primary' for man. This is because, as discussed, with the concrete division in the self between what *is* and what *could be* was born both conscience and man's capacity to create ideals. In brief, with this was born, as Nietzsche says 'what will later be called his soul'⁷³; his defining capacity to transcend the immediacy of nature.

D. The Slave revolt: *secondary perversion*

[i] Introduction: value creation and man as 'risk'

Continuing therefore, we have identified what we have called a 'primary perversion' in man's phylogenesis. And further, allowing for conscience and value creation, we have seen how this is what necessarily constitutes man *as man*. However, in terms of our overall project, this still leaves the question of 'secondary perversion'. For did we not say that if bad conscience is a primary perversion necessarily founding man's being, this allows for a subsequent, contingent, perversion of that more basic process? And, further did we not say that then this would open up the possibility for a critique of that secondary phenomenon? This is because, not being constitutionally necessary for man, this secondary aspect of man's phylogenesis could then meaningfully be resisted and transformed. And in turn, did we not argue that, this meaning man's species past was still 'at stake', it could then contribute to a sense of man *as* genesis? We did. Yet in order to demonstrate why this is the case, and to resolve the central issue of our chapter, we of course have to answer a series of further, essential questions. In other words, we have to ask first of all what exactly the nature of this secondary perversion is. In particular we need to ask how the 'slave revolt' which Nietzsche wants man to overcome, can be seen as a perversion of bad conscience's founding perversity. And second, related to this, we need also to ask why it is that this then means such a phenomenon is worthy of critique. For it is only by addressing these questions, and understanding why slave

⁷³ *GM*: II: SS16

morality is ‘the *great* danger to mankind’⁷⁴, that we will be able to bring our enquiry regarding man’s genesis to a close.

But how are we to do this? Well, we begin by observing that with bad conscience is brought into the world both great potential and great risk. As Nietzsche says, it is because of this development that ‘...man has been included among the most unexpected and exciting throws of dice played by Heraclitus’ “great child”, call him Zeus or fate.’⁷⁵ And this is because with man has been brought into the world the possibility for the creation of values. For, as we have seen, the internalisation of man created in him a ‘no’, and thus the power to forge ideals transcending the given. Moreover this is relevant to our discussion because, first of all, this gave him a unique opportunity. That is, it gave him the chance to bring ‘a wealth of novel, disconcerting beauty and affirmation to light.’⁷⁶ It gave him, in short, through bad conscience the chance for the highest expression of active will-to-power seen, by affirming himself through the creation of new values. And this is relevant, we can say, because it was *this* higher will to power which was then perverted by the slaves. For, it was this unique potential, derived from bad conscience, which also brought the risk for the first time that will-to-power could deny itself and become re-active.⁷⁷ And in turn, then it is to this process, and the perversion of active value creation, that we will now look. That is, we must look at this process both to understand how slave morality is a ‘secondary perversion’, and why Nietzsche sees this as so deserving of condemnation.

[ii] How affirmative values are originally created: the nobles

Continuing, though, in order to understand the perversion of active value creation we must say more about what this active value creating is. In other words, to understand this perversion we must look first at what it is that is being perverted, and how this is a continuation of the active force of bad conscience. For it is only then that the nature of the slave revolt as a secondary perversion will become apparent. And it is to explain this point that we first look at what Nietzsche says about the form the ‘original’ value creation takes. This is because, as he claims,

⁷⁴ *GM*: Preface: SS5

⁷⁵ *GM*: II: SS16

⁷⁶ *GM*: II: SS18

⁷⁷ See Ridley, p22: in a view similar to our own he argues that bad conscience was a necessary ‘foundation’ for resentment.

...it has been 'the good' themselves, meaning the noble, the mighty, the high placed, and the high minded, who saw and judged themselves and their actions as good...It was from this *pathos of distance* that they first claimed the right to create values and give these values names: usefulness was none of their concern! The standpoint of usefulness is as alien and inappropriate as it can be to such a heated eruption of the highest rank-ordering and rank-defining value judgements...The pathos of nobility and distance, as I said, the continuing and predominant feeling of complete and fundamental superiority of a higher kind to a lower kind, to those 'below' - *that* is the origin of the antithesis 'good' and 'bad'.⁷⁸ [GM: I: 2]

As such we can say to begin with, that two essential things are true of original value creation for Nietzsche. And the first is that value, what is considered 'good', does not, in contradiction to widespread belief, 'emanate from those to whom goodness is shown'. Rather, he claims values come 'from the good themselves'. That is to say, values arise not from the *recipients*, or beneficiaries of actions or traits, but from the very people who *commit* the actions, and who possess these traits. And what this means is that values are not created out of considerations of usefulness, from the prudential praising of certain actions that may be beneficial or useful. Instead we can say values are created out of an originary existential impulse to affirm one's existence or mode of being in the world. In other words, value creation is a more sophisticated and higher mode of that will-to-power present in all life. For through the creation of ideals we see now a new, profound way through which man can impose himself, 'leave a mark', on the world. However, the second point Nietzsche makes clear is that such self-affirming value creation is not something of which simply anyone or any group is capable. For whilst bad conscience allows all human beings to *have* ideals, it would seem that only a select few possess the power-will necessary to *create* them. Instead, as he says, 'the right to create values', 'the seigneurial privilege of giving names'⁷⁹, belongs only to those 'higher' types', the 'mighty, the high-placed, the high-minded', possessing what he calls 'the pathos of distance.' In short, the ability to affirm one's existence through the creation of values belongs to 'the nobles' alone.

⁷⁸ GM: I: 2

⁷⁹ Ibid

[iii] Why only the nobles can affirm themselves, and therefore create values

Yet this last point, of course, begs the question as to why Nietzsche thinks this is the case. That is, it begs the question as to why he believes only noble, 'higher' types, are capable of affirming their mode of existence through the creation of values. And it is hoped then that we can reveal more about the link between 'affirmation' and value creation, and therefore slave perversion, by looking at this issue. For, doubtless to begin with, the answer has something to do with the specific capacity of the nobles for self-affirmation. And this, we can say, has typically been interpreted in a 'passive' sense. This is because it has been argued that only the nobles are capable of value-creating self-affirmation as it is only they, rather than the slaves, who can stand in a genuinely affirmative relation to life. It is then the privileged conditions of their lives which, on this view, uniquely allow them to affirm themselves. As Conway says, 'The designation *good*...originated with the nobles' selfish or egoistic assertion of their own incomparable self-worth and unrivalled social station.'⁸⁰ Put another way, it is the noble's sense of self-worth, based on privilege and social superiority, which allows them to affirm themselves and their lives as 'good'. Conversely, we can say, the opposite is true for the downtrodden. That is, for those whose lives are characterised by misery and subordination it is their unhappiness which equally prevents them stamping on their mode of existence any positive value.

In other words then, it is their actual situation which holds them back. For however much inferior groups may *wish* to validate their mode of existence through value creation, it remains the privilege of those who can genuinely believe their lives are worth affirming. And it is this point which may explain why only the nobles, uniquely able to affirm their lives as *actually* good, have the 'right to create values'.⁸¹ However, such an interpretation is also limited. For, whilst this view explains why value creation remains a 'seigniorial privilege', it also faces several key problems. Not least in this regard, such a position casts doubts over the noble's strength of motivation for affirming themselves through value-creation in this way. That is to say, if in order to create values through self-affirmation the nobles must already have a life worth affirming, then whatever extra validation can be gained from calling this life 'good' cannot really be that significant. In short, since their life already is essentially affirmed, then what great desire can there be to affirm it further through the creation of values?

⁸⁰ Conway, p30-31

⁸¹ According to Mulhall and Ridley this is also because they can lead unrepressed lives whereby they can, in unmediated fashion, satisfy their desires.

Consequently on this view it would seem value-creation is deprived of real significance. Summed up in Owen's claim that 'the noble's power over others is interpreted by him as a virtue, as a signification of his own goodness'⁸², their values would be merely a reflection of existing social power. That is, self-affirmation gained through value creation would become here a passive, and inconsequential, gloss on an affirmative relation that would exist anyway. And continuing, if this is the case it is hard to see why Nietzsche would then consider the overturning of noble values to be such a negative development.⁸³ It is for this reason therefore, that there must be something more to the relationship between value creation and self-affirmation than this idea of passive reflection. Further, there must also be another reason why self-affirming value creation remains a privilege of the nobles. But what would this be? An answer may be found if we ask a more basic question regarding the identity of that group. That is, an answer may be found if we ask who Nietzsche really is talking about in the case of 'the nobles'.

And we can begin in this case by saying that, against Conway, the nobles are not defined simply by being in a position of social privilege or power. For, as we have seen, this could not in itself explain why they are uniquely able to create values, or the significance Nietzsche attaches to them. Nor, though, can they be defined by what Mulhall calls a 'wholly spontaneous instinctual life.'⁸⁴ For, whilst there is a certain kinship with the original blond beasts, they could not create values at all unless subject to the internalisation affecting all those living in a state. And in this sense they should not simply be associated with, as Thomas Mann puts it, 'a clinical picture of infantile sadism, before which our souls writhe in embarrassment.'⁸⁵ Yet a comparison with the original creators of states does give us a sense of what Nietzsche might mean here instead. In other words, by contrasting the nobles with the 'artist's cruelty' of the blond beasts, we will be able to see how a similar but different nature is at work there. And this can be seen in what Nietzsche says about the 'barbarity' of this group. This is because, as he argues:

⁸² Owen, p77

⁸³ Metzger similarly criticises the noble as 'one dimensional and stagnant', p133, and is therefore unable properly to see what is wrong with slave resentment or to understand Nietzsche's critique of it.

⁸⁴ Mulhall, p41-42

⁸⁵ Thomas Mann [From Janaway, p95-96] [Mann: 1959: 165] See also M. Nordau, Conway, p156: 'the real Nietzsche gang consists of born imbecile criminals.'

⁸⁶ Mulhall and Metzger give more 'positive' spins on this idea of the nobles as unrepressed: Metzger: p133, 'The nobles...are able to take a self-affirming attitude toward themselves and thus toward life or the world. See also Mulhall, p43: positive valuation of the nobles in mythical and 'pre-lapsarian' terms.

...even their highest culture betrays the fact that they were conscious of this and indeed proud of it [for example, when Pericles, in that famous funeral oration, tells his Athenians: 'Our daring has forced a path to every land and sea, erecting timeless memorials to itself everywhere for good and ill']. This daring of the noble races, mad, absurd, and sudden in the way it manifests itself, the unpredictability and even the improbability of their undertakings...their unconcern and scorn for safety, body, life, comfort, their shocking cheerfulness and depth of delight in all destruction, in all the debauches of victory and cruelty -all this, for those who suffered under it, was summed up in the image of the barbarian, the 'evil enemy' ...⁸⁷ [GM: I: 11]

Consequently we can see there is a link between the original blond beasts and the nobles. And this is constituted by a certain kind of 'daring' and courage as bound to a particular kind of instinct. For as Nietzsche suggests in this passage, the true noble is one who scorns his own 'safety, body, life, comfort', is willing to risk his own life, to follow a more fundamental 'active' drive. This fundamental drive, which Nietzsche calls 'will to power' and the 'instinct for freedom'⁸⁸, is what then these types share [in common]. That is, they share 'a desire to overthrow, crush, become master, to be a thirst for enemies, resistance and triumphs.'⁸⁹ And in both cases this amounts to more than simply 'infantile sadism' or having the power and inclination to do as they please. For rather than simply being given, their power-will and mastery are necessarily *accomplishments*. In other words, they need to struggle with, and hence risk themselves against, resistances and enemies in order to impose themselves on existence in that way. And further by doing so they find ways to create and impose form on the world, thus 'erecting timeless memorials'⁹⁰ to themselves. That is, they find ways through struggle to overcome, to discipline, to organise, to create.

However, returning to our original point we can now also see how a potential distinction between these two groups emerges. For, whilst the blond beasts realised their higher active force through the struggle to create the state, evidently the nobles cannot do the same. Further, as children of that process, they are now also to some extent repressed. Consequently they must find a slightly altered means to impose form and order on the world.

⁸⁷ GM: I: SS11

⁸⁸ GM: II: SS18

⁸⁹ GM: I: SS13

⁹⁰ GM: I: SS11

And having been internalised they thus utilise their higher will-to-power to create ideals. In other words, they create ‘noble’ values, which both emerge from, and encourage, the struggle and risk necessary to impose oneself on existence. That is, they create values promoting ‘active’ courage, discipline, honesty⁹¹ and struggle, and which themselves represent a challenge to live by. And such an ideal perhaps is given one of its most advanced expressions in the form of the ‘sovereign individual.’⁹² For whilst Nietzsche says frustratingly little about the precise nature of noble values, in this type we see what a developed noble ideal might look like. That is, we see the ideal of a man ‘who gives his word as something that can be relied on, because he is strong enough to remain upright in the face of mishap or even ‘in the face of fate.’⁹³ And this can represent the future of a noble ideal because it is rooted in the affirmative power, struggle, discipline and self-mastery of the active force. In short, with this unique power of holding one’s word against all fate, we see the struggle to give highest creative form and organisation to oneself.^{94,95}

[iv] The nature of the slaves: why they can’t affirm themselves or create values

Where though does all this leave us in terms of our argument? Well, we said to begin with that the slave revolt was a ‘secondary perversion’ of the active value creation allowed for by the perversity of bad conscience. That is, slave morality was a re-active perversion of a creative process which continued the active force present in bad conscience. And as such we said that to understand the nature of this perversion, and hence why Nietzsche wants to condemn it, we had to look more closely at that process. In brief we had to look more closely at that original ‘active’ value creation. And in so doing we observed two things for Nietzsche. They were, first of all, that original value creation is tied to self-affirmation, and second that only ‘the nobles’ possess the affirmative relation necessary for this. Continuing therefore, we have now seen why this is the case. For by comparing the nobles with the original blond beasts, we have seen how self-affirmation is not a passive reflection of a ‘good’ and privileged life but represents rather a continuous *achievement*. That is, it is something gained

⁹¹ See *GM*: I: SS5: ‘they call themselves the truthful’

⁹² *GM*: II: SS2

⁹³ *GM*: II: SS2

⁹⁴ See also *GM*: II: SS11 for discussion of the nobles as possessing conscience. See also *TSZ* section on ‘War and Warriors’ for another idea of what the noble ideal might look like.

⁹⁵ See Clifford, D. Clifford ‘Nietzsche’s Autonomy ideal’, University of Southampton Doctoral Thesis, 2011, for the idea that Nietzsche’s: sovereign individual is linked to nobility. For as he says, ‘the sovereign individual does not straightforwardly represent any Nietzschean autonomy ideal for the future, but is rather a figure from the past.’ p2

through the struggle and effort to impose one's will on existence by overcoming resistance. And it is therefore clear why only noble types can affirm themselves and create values. For, it is only through such risk in life, through 'the daring charge at danger or at the enemy'⁹⁶, that we genuinely carve out and affirm our existence. In short, it is only this way that we are distinguished as 'one who *is*, who has reality'⁹⁷ as opposed to one who is merely alive. And continuing, it is then this noble sense of affirmation which alone allows for value creation.⁹⁸ This is because it is only when there is thus a *real* life and perspective, one won, that an ideal in relation to that life can be expressed. In other words, it is only when 'poets will now have something to sing about and celebrate'⁹⁹, when something real provides the material, that a value can be born.

Yet how does all this help us with our original question? How does explaining why value creation remains a 'seigneurial privilege'¹⁰⁰ help us understand the slave revolt as a secondary perversion?¹⁰¹ The answer is that, first of all, it now allows us to see why conversely the slaves *cannot* themselves create values in this way. And thus it points the way to understanding the motivation for, and nature of, the slave's perversion of active value creation. For if it is fidelity to an 'active' force that allows for the creation of values then it must be alienation from this which prevents it. In other words, if risk and struggle allow the nobles to affirm themselves and create values, then it must be aversion to these things which prevents the slaves from doing so. And it is this point then that allows us to understand the slave's true nature and hence why they are the source of the second perversion. For as Nietzsche suggests in the *Genealogy* the term 'common man', or slave, is etymologically identified with 'Cowardice' and with 'dishonesty' in Greek.¹⁰² And further the slaves deny 'activity', since their happiness 'manifests itself as essentially a narcotic, an anaesthetic, rest, peace, 'Sabbath'...in short as something passive.'¹⁰³ Still, if we want to elaborate on the slave's nature and how this leads to their perverse revolt, we must say more about this 'passivity' or 'cowardice'. And the best way to do this is by looking at Nietzsche's discussion of noble and 'common' natures in *The Gay Science*. This is because he contrasts there the

⁹⁶ GM: I: SS10

⁹⁷ GM: I: SS5

⁹⁸ For a conception of 'affirmation' more explicitly linked to the individual and to the problem of nihilism see B. Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life* [London: Harvard University Press, 2008].

⁹⁹ GM: I: SS11

¹⁰⁰ GM: I: SS2

¹⁰¹ See also F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* trans. by R.J. Hollingdale [London: Penguin, 1973]: SS260: 'The noble type of man feels *himself* to be the determiner of values...he knows himself to be that which in general first accords honour to things, he *creates values*.'

¹⁰² GM: I: SS5

¹⁰³ GM: I: SS10

passion of the noble to that of the common man. That is, he says, 'What distinguishes the common nature is that it unflinchingly keeps sight of its advantage, and that this thought...is even stronger than its strongest drives; not to allow these drives to lead it astray to perform inexpeditious acts - that is its wisdom and self-esteem.'¹⁰⁴

Put another way then, what characterises the common or 'slavish' nature for Nietzsche is a certain kind of prudence. Whereas the noble, as we have seen, is instinctively willing to 'scorn safety, body, and life'¹⁰⁵ in order to impose himself on the world, the plebeian nature instinctively and continuously does otherwise. That is, it keeps site of its own advantage and survival, avoiding anything which may threaten these. And this is why, for Nietzsche, the term 'slave' is also associated with 'cowardice'. Indeed, as he goes on to say, this is why in noble valuations 'The cowardly, the timid, the petty, and those who think only of narrow utility are despised; as are the mistrustful with their constricted glance.'¹⁰⁶ And furthermore, it is this prudential concern for survival and utility which alienates the slave from the active self-affirming force of the nobles. To explain, his desire for prudential 'advantage' leads him to evade the danger, unpredictability, and indeterminacy, inherent in all great struggle and adventure. That is, this desire leads him to avoid that which can't be safely calculated. And this means, in turn, that the slave evades the very thing which is necessary for true self-affirming activity. In short, he avoids the confrontation and overcoming of resistance which allows one's will to be truly etched into the fabric of existence.¹⁰⁷

Consequently for Nietzsche, the distinction between slave and noble cannot here be understood solely, or originally, in political terms. Rather, the distinction refers, on a more fundamental level, also to a hierarchy of spirit or nature. As Nietzsche says, 'The noble caste was in the beginning always the barbarian caste: their superiority lay, not in their physical strength but primarily in their psychical - they were *more complete* human beings.'¹⁰⁸ And this confirms then that Ridley is not entirely correct when he says of the slave that 'Triumphant self-affirmation isn't possible for him: he is too weak and powerless.'¹⁰⁹ For, it is the psychical weakness of the slaves, rather than just their physical or political weakness, which prevents them affirming themselves. In other words, it is their fear, timidity and

¹⁰⁴ GS: SS3: 'Noble and common'

¹⁰⁵ GM: I: SS11

¹⁰⁶ BG: SS260

¹⁰⁷ See also GM: II: 12, for discussion of difference between the instinct to survive and 'adapt' and the active force

¹⁰⁸ BG: SS257

¹⁰⁹ Ridley, p167

concern for survival, their evasion of great struggle and conflict, which means they cannot actively impose their will on the world. And further it is this which means they will lack the capacity to affirm themselves through the creation of values. This is because if their orientation to the world is defined by such passivity, they will lack the active self-affirmative relation necessary to impose themselves through the forging of values. And if this is the case they will then be unable ‘to set their seal on everything and every occurrence with a sound and thereby take possession of it.’¹¹⁰

[v] The slave’s dilemma and his response: initial resentment

However, does this then get us closer to understanding secondary perversion? That is, if we have explained the slave’s true nature, and why this means they cannot affirm themselves and create value, are we then closer to grasping how the original active force is perverted? The answer is in a sense ‘yes’. For, with this we now can see the slave faces a dilemma.¹¹¹ This is because, as Ridley puts it, the slave exists in a situation where ‘Triumphant self-affirmation isn’t possible for him...But he longs for it nonetheless.’¹¹² In other words, although the slave cannot affirm himself through value-creation, he still has a *need* for an interpretation of life which would somehow validate his mode of existence.¹¹³ And it is from this essential dilemma we can say then that his perversion of the noble’s active value creation emerges. For how is the slave to find a set of values that can give his life meaning if his psychical weakness prevents him creating them himself? In short, how can the slave discover the morality he needs unless he somehow *does something* with the values others have created? And it is this sense then that the answers to these questions, and our grasping the solution to the slave’s dilemma, will answer our own question regarding secondary perversion.

Yet how specifically are we to understand how this dilemma leads the slave to a perversion and a solution? Well, the first point to make in this regard is that this problem causes the slave to suffer. That is, as Nietzsche says, for the slave ‘something was missing...he himself could think of no justification or explanation or affirmation, he *suffered*

¹¹⁰ *GM*: I: SS2

¹¹¹ Note the similarity to the problem raised by Leiter regarding slave revolt: how if the slaves are by nature weak, are they able to overthrow the, by definition, stronger nobles, without qualifying them as no longer being ‘weak’. Leiter’s solution involves an appeal to the figure of the priest.

¹¹² Ridley, p17

¹¹³ Nietzsche says that the slave still has an ‘instinct of self-affirmation’ even if he cannot truly satisfy it: *GM*: I: SS13, He, ‘has an instinct of self-preservation and self-affirmation in which every lie is sanctified.’

from the problem of what he meant.’¹¹⁴ And this is significant because such suffering is instrumental in causing *ressentiment*, something which is essential to the slave’s perversion of active values. For, as Nietzsche explains: ‘every sufferer instinctively looks for a cause of his distress; more exactly for a culprit, even more precisely for a *guilty* culprit...—in short, for a living being upon whom he can release his emotions, actually or in effigy, on some pretext or other.’¹¹⁵ In other words, the slave’s suffering sparks a desire to find someone to *blame* for his ‘distress’; someone upon whom he can vent his rancour.¹¹⁶ That is, as Poellner has observed, *ressentiment* needs another who can be apprehended ‘as in some respects superior and as dislikeable or hateful.’¹¹⁷ And this is important because it is the nobles who fit that bill. For it is thus the case that *ressentiment* now enters the slaves into an ideological relation with the nobles, and specifically noble valuations. And thus continuing it is this relationship then that will provide the key to solving their dilemma.

This is because, further, of the nature and inner logic of *ressentiment*. For this emotion directed at the nobles does in some sense help to address the problem facing the slaves. That is, by being able to direct hatred and blame towards another, the slaves are given a sense of meaning and affirmation now *negatively*, as victims, as the persecuted.¹¹⁸ Their existence is afforded, derivatively, the significance which was lacking previously, and which existed initially only for the noble. In other words, they are afforded some sense of being ‘the one who *is*, who has reality, who really exists and is true’.¹¹⁹ And this doubtless helps point the way to a solution to the slave’s dilemma, and to showing how a parasitical perversion of noble values might achieve this. For the slaves’ identity and affirmation here as ‘victims’, through *ressentiment*, relies upon the prior affirmation and value system of another. However unfortunately, any sense of affirmation derived solely in this way remains limited. For inevitably a feeling on the slave’s part that they are somehow defined as being ‘the persecuted’ does not fully affirm their mode of being. That is, such an identity as ‘the noble’s victim’ does not amount to an interpretation of existence wholly validating their lives. And

¹¹⁴ *GM*: III: SS28

¹¹⁵ *GM*: III: SS15: ‘...In my judgement we find here the actual physiological causation of *ressentiment*’

¹¹⁶ *Ressentiment* is not, as has been argued [see Ridley and Owen, p78,] a result of suffering or frustration in general, but only emerges when one is able and willing to blame others for one’s suffering. That is, *ressentiment* is essentially other directed, and typically when the other is not really responsible.

¹¹⁷ P. Poellner, ‘*Ressentiment and morality*’ in *Nietzsche’s On the Genealogy of Morality: A critical guide*, ed. by S. May [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011], p130

¹¹⁸ *Ressentiment* is also alleged to alleviate the sufferer’s pain in other ways, see *GM*: III: SS15, and SS20

¹¹⁹ *GM*: I: SS5

because of this, as Owen notes, it is still the case that ‘the slaves experience themselves as objects of disdain’¹²⁰, and thus need something more.

In order to gain this then, the derivative affirmation afforded by resentment in its initial state must undergo a further development.¹²¹ And this occurs only when it ‘swells into something huge and uncanny to a most intellectual and poisonous level.’¹²² In other words, the slaves find their illusive self-affirmation, and we see how they are able to pervert noble values, only when resentment is allowed to grow and fester. That is, when resentment reaches through this such a pitch of intensity that, as Nietzsche argues, it ‘turns creative.’¹²³ But why we may ask, first of all, does resentment have to ‘swell’ and build up in such a fashion? Why for the slaves, is resentment not something that can be controlled or ‘consumed and exhausted in an immediate reaction’?¹²⁴ An obvious answer would be that the desire for ‘revenge’, generally viewed as the goal of resentment, cannot be satisfied because of the slave’s political position. In brief, as Mulhall suggests, politically oppressed and physically weak, the slave cannot gain external or ‘real’ revenge against the nobles. And this is what causes the build up and intensification of his resentment.

Yet such a view, based on what we have said about the nature of resentment, seems overly simplistic.¹²⁵ For it appears not to be just a straightforward desire for revenge. Indeed, as Nietzsche argues, the aim of resentment is not ‘the defensive return of a blow, a purely protective reaction...such as that performed by a headless frog to ward off corrosive acid.’¹²⁶ That is, it is not to be identified with the purpose, in terms of revenge, of simply returning the ‘blow inflicted’ and preventing further suffering. Rather, there is something essentially more complex and ‘warped’ in the aim of this phenomenon. And this is because, as he says, the men of resentment

enjoy being mistrustful and dwelling on wrongs and imagined slights: they rummage through the bowels of their past and present for obscure,

¹²⁰ Owen, p78

¹²¹ See Ridley, p26, for discussion of difference between ‘uncreative’ resentment, and ‘creative’ resentment

¹²² *GM*: I: SS7

¹²³ *GM*: I: SS10

¹²⁴ *GM*: I: SS10. Nietzsche seems to suggest that resentment could be neutralised by ‘activity’, in our sense, i.e. it is not the actual gaining of revenge which neutralises resentment, since this could not really resolve the basic problem from which it stems, *but* another mode of non-reactive activity altogether. That is, one which is able to affirm life and hence eliminate the underlying cause of resentment, lack of self-affirmation.

¹²⁵ As well as contradicting our general point that the first essay cannot simply be about the internalisation of revenge, and that the essence of slavery, here, is not political.

¹²⁶ *GM*: III: SS15

questionable stories that will allow them to wallow in tortured suspicion, and intoxicate themselves... [GM: III: SS15]

In other words, with resentment as opposed to simple revenge, there is not a straightforward desire to discharge the emotion in question. Instead with it there comes a perverse enjoyment in uncovering new pretexts for hatred, and in dwelling upon and exaggerating those that already exist. That is, there is a desire to extend and deepen the sources of hatred, rather than seeking to pay back or eliminate them. And it is precisely this point further, which chimes with what we said about the origins of slave resentment. For if the slave's hatred of the noble is really a way of evading a more fundamental, self-imposed, problem, 'their weakness with regards to themselves'¹²⁷, then resentment never truly seeks satisfaction. That is to say, resentment toward the nobles is inherently self-deceiving in terms of its aims. For what it really seeks but cannot admit, is the perpetuation of the pretext for blame, not its actual removal as a source of suffering. And this means, in turn, that the emotion by its very nature can never properly be satisfied. In short, it means that unless otherwise neutralised it has an inherent tendency to develop into what Nietzsche calls a 'cauldron of unassuaged hatred.'¹²⁸

[vi] *The 'evil enemy': how intensification of resentment leads to slave values*

Consequently resentment, because of its own warped, physiologically obstructed nature, has an innate tendency to self-intensification. And it is this point which then answers our earlier question as to why resentment grows and 'swells into something huge and uncanny to a most intellectual and poisonous level.'¹²⁹ However, we must now explain what follows on from this. For we must ask how this intensification develops the partial, derivative, affirmation afforded by initial resentment, into something that can *wholly* affirm the slave's mode of being. In other words, we must ask how resentment's intensification comes to solve the dilemma of the slave's existence. That is, we must ask how this development allows the slave his own self-affirming morality when he cannot create values himself. For it is in doing this, to return, that we address our essential question regarding

¹²⁷ Metzger, p137

¹²⁸ GM: I: SS11

¹²⁹ GM: I: SS7

secondary perversion. In short, in doing this we show how the slave ‘creates’ values by parasitically appropriating and perverting the original ‘active’ values of the noble.

But how are we to do this? How do we show how resentment’s growth leads to the birth of slave morality through the perversion of noble values? Well, we begin by recalling that resentment initially gave the slaves a limited sense of affirmation through the being of another. That is by hating the noble, as being responsible for his suffering, the slave derivatively gains identity as ‘the noble’s victim’. And thus it is the intensification of *this* parasitical, other focused, logic which might explain how a more fully fledged system of slave affirmation came to be. For as Nietzsche says, ‘Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying ‘yes’ to itself, slave morality says ‘no’ on principle to everything that is ‘outside’, ‘other’, ‘non-self’: and *this* ‘no’ is its creative deed.’¹³⁰ And furthermore then the intensification of resentment allows the slave wholly to affirm himself by allowing for an ultimate act of other negation. That is, the intensification of resentment’s logic derivatively gives the slave values, by creating the ultimate object of hatred. In other words, through the festering and swelling of hatred, ‘he has conceived of the “evil enemy”, “the evil one” as a basic idea to which he now thinks up a copy and counterpart, “the good one” himself!’¹³¹ And it is as such, this ‘evil enemy’, which holds the key to answering our questions. For if the noble as merely hated gives the slave partial affirmation as the ‘noble’s victim’, then the noble as something *even worse*, may provide the slave with full affirmation. In short, this ultimate negation of the other may provide an answer as to how in ‘not being *this*’, the slave can discover a sense of himself as ‘good’.¹³²

However, in order to explain how exactly this is the case we need to look more closely at what is meant here by ‘evil’. That is, in order to explain how this idea allows for slave values we must ask how the evil one, as opposed to one who is just hated, is created. In short, we must ask how this conception of the ‘evil enemy’ is created from the slave’s initial attitude toward the noble, and what changes so that someone is regarded in this way. Now, we have already observed that this initial attitude is characterised by hatred and develops when the slave finds a way to identify the noble as a ‘guilty culprit’.¹³³ But what is it then that distinguishes someone who is merely blamed, and hated, for one’s suffering into one who is

¹³⁰ *GM*: I: SS10

¹³¹ *Ibid*

¹³² See also R. Wallace ‘Resentment, Value, and Self-Vindication: Making sense of Nietzsche’s Slave Revolt’ in *Nietzsche and Morality* ed. by Leiter and Sinhababu [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007] Wallace discusses the problem of how we move from resentment to new values, and criticises Nietzsche for not being clear enough about this process.

¹³³ *GM*: III: SS15

deemed 'evil'? For Nietzsche the answer seems to rest upon the development and utilisation of a certain idea of agency. And it is to understand his point here that we must look, first, at how he views this conception. For he says that 'popular morality separates strength from the manifestations of strength, as though there were an indifferent substratum behind the strong person which had the *freedom* to manifest strength or not.'¹³⁴

In other words, popular morality and the slave formulate the idea that there is a substantial subject 'behind' action, or the manifestation of power, which as a result has freedom of choice over its actions. And, we can say, it is the utilisation of this belief which then helps construct the 'evil enemy'. For as Nietzsche explains,

...the entrenched, secretly smouldering emotions of revenge and hatred put this belief to their own use and, in fact, do not defend any belief more passionately than that the strong are free to be weak, and the birds of prey are free to be lambs: - in this way, they gain the right to make the birds of prey *responsible* for being birds of prey. [GM: I: SS13]

Put another way then, belief in the 'subject' and its essential freedom allows the slave to see the noble in a new way. This is because he can now attribute to the latter a new depth of responsibility for his suffering. That is, rather than the suffering the noble inflicts being an arbitrary consequence of his nature, albeit one the slave resents, it appears now to be the deliberate and malicious action of one who could do otherwise. And it is thus in this sense that the noble can be viewed as 'evil'. For regarding the noble's self-affirming, suffering inflicting activity as a choice, the slaves can see the noble as uniquely, and morally, despicable. In short they can move from a view of the nobles as simply figures of fear and hate, to figures that can be considered 'low', abhorrent and 'immoral'.

Yet if this explains what is meant here by 'evil', how does this then help explain how slave morality is created out of it? That is, does this conception help us grasp how the slave can 'create' his own values derivatively, by perverting the active force of the nobles? The answer, to begin with, revolves around the universalisation that such a notion of evil allows. This is because it is by applying the designation of 'evil' to the nobles, in terms of a freely chosen mode of activity, that the slave is able to universalise his negative relation to them. In other words, the slaves are able, as Nietzsche says, to believe through this that 'what they

¹³⁴ GM: I: SS13. This can usefully be contrasted with Sartre's criticism of the subject 'behind' activity in *Transcendence of the Ego* trans. by A. Brown [London: Routledge, 2004]

hate is not their enemy, oh no! They hate ‘injustice’, ‘godlessness.’¹³⁵ And as a consequence the slaves can *moralise* their hatred of the nobles. That is, they can suggest that the actions of the nobles are not simply bad for them, but represent a universal category of what is bad *per se*, a mode of ‘immorality’. And in turn it is *this* point then, the universalising of the noble’s action as ‘immoral’, which paves the way for slave values. For, it is by then conceiving of the noble as immoral that the slave moves from being derivatively ‘*not noble*’ to derivatively ‘*not immoral*’, and hence moral, good.

Nonetheless more must be said about this process. This is because the slaves are only able to affirm themselves as ‘good’ in this way by a further move. And this is linked to another transformation of how they view the noble. For just as the slaves suppress the particularity of their hatred in designating noble action as ‘evil’, denying its relation to their own position, then so do they suppress the particularity of the noble’s actions. That is, in calling that activity ‘evil’, they imagine it is no longer the exclusive expression of strength of a particular group. Rather, instead of being something of which slaves are innately incapable, it is now a universal possibility which any subject could ‘choose’. And it is this idea then, that *the slave too* could have chosen to be evil, which becomes critical in the creation of his ‘good’. For, as Nietzsche suggests, it is precisely this notion of evil as a universal possibility which allows the slaves to think something remarkable. In other words, it allows them to say, ‘Let us be different from evil people, let us be good!’ And a good person is anyone who does not rape, does not harm anyone, who does not attack, does not retaliate, who leaves the taking of revenge to God, who keeps hidden as we do, avoids all evil...’¹³⁶

Put another way then, this idea that evil action is a universal possibility allows the slave to think that the ‘good’ can consist in choosing *not* to be ‘evil’. And it is as such, this idea which allows the slave to construe his weakness, his inability to act, as something essentially positive. Of course, as Nietzsche says, ‘this means if heard coolly and impartially, nothing more than: ‘We weak people are just weak; it is good to do nothing *for which we are not strong enough*.’¹³⁷ However, viewed from the self-deceiving perspective of the slave, it is also what allows him to affirm his mode of existence, and to solve his dilemma. For as Nietzsche says, it has ‘facilitated that sublime self-deception whereby the majority of the dying, the weak and the oppressed....could construe weakness itself as freedom, and their

¹³⁵ *GM*: I: SS14

¹³⁶ *GM*: I: SS13

¹³⁷ *Ibid*

particular mode of existence as an *accomplishment*.¹³⁸ That is, the notion that weakness is a choice allows the slave for the first time to affirm that *he is good*. In short, by construing ‘not being evil’ as an accomplishment he uncovers his own self-affirming slave values, and does so without having first to create them himself. And it is thus clear continuing, how this process then represents a secondary perversion. For the slave’s ‘creation’ of values is here based not on an original self-affirmation but the negation of prior noble affirmative activity. In other words, the birth of slave morality, from the idea of evil, is based on the parasitical appropriation and inversion of that original active force the nobles represent.

E. Conclusion: *Two modes of perversion, critique, and man as becoming*

Yet have we then with this answered the questions with which we began this section? That is, have we now explained how slave values can be seen as a contingent ‘secondary’ perversion of bad conscience’s initial founding perversity? And, related to this, have we shown why this means such a phenomenon is then deserving of critique? In a sense we have. For looking back we began by saying that man’s internalisation allowed, through the power of negating the given, the possibility in him of creating values. And further we saw that noble value creation represented the authentic mode of that possibility, and hence the continuation of the active force. That is, noble values continued the ‘formative and rapacious’,¹³⁹ force which imposed itself by overcoming resistance, and which was present in bad conscience.¹⁴⁰ Yet we then had to ask another question. We had to ask how it was that the slave revolt was as such a ‘perversion’ of this active mode of value creation derived from bad conscience. And in turn, we attempted to answer this by first asking why value creation was not ‘a sort of general privilege of mankind.’¹⁴¹ In other words, to discover how the slaves perverted active values we had to explain why it was that they were unable to authentically create values themselves.

Continuing therefore we did this by contrasting the nature of the nobles and the slaves. We said then that the nobles were able originally to create value because they were willing to engage in risk and struggle to overcome resistance. Put differently, their ‘scorn for

¹³⁸ *GM*: I: SS13

¹³⁹ *GM*: II: SS18

¹⁴⁰ This is in contrast to the view of Deleuze, for whom bad conscience is re-active. Nonetheless Kaufmann, p252-255, and Schacht, p218-224, are closer to our position regarding bad conscience in so far as both suggest why ‘repression’ and bad conscience may be positive.

¹⁴¹ *GM*: I: SS2

safety, body, life, comfort'¹⁴² allows them to impose their will on the world, and it is this then which, genuinely affirming their being, provides the matter to create ideals. In contrast, though, it is the slaves' concern for self-interest and survival which means they cannot affirm their mode of life in this way. That is, what Metzger calls 'their weakness with regards to themselves'¹⁴³ means they avoid the struggle necessary to forge a real identity, and hence cannot carve a value into existence. Yet to return, this contrast then allowed us to understand the origins of the slave's perversion of noble values. For, whilst the slave cannot create values originally himself, he still might satisfy his need for meaning and affirmation by somehow utilising the noble's active values. And the initial means by which this is achieved is through *ressentiment*. That is, whereby the slave derivatively gains an identity in relation to the noble as his victim. In turn though we also said such a solution to the slave's dilemma here was only partial. Rather in order for the slave fully to affirm himself *ressentiment* had to 'turn creative', 'and give birth to values.'¹⁴⁴¹⁴⁵ And *this* was only achieved when the *ressentiment*'s hatred had intensified to such a pitch that from the hated enemy was born an idea of 'evil'. That is to say, that the slave could affirm himself when he invented the notion that the noble was in fact one who had *chosen* to be active and dominating. For in suggesting that anyone could choose to be evil in this way, the slave conversely set up his passivity as a choice *not to be evil*. In short, he could set up his own being, defined by the absence of accomplishment, as a positive achievement, the achievement of *not being* immoral, and hence of being moral, 'good'.

Consequently, with this we can see how the slave's dilemma regarding values and affirmation is solved. Furthermore we can now also see how this represents a subsequent perversion of something, noble value, that directly continues from the primary perversity of bad conscience. For the slave is only able to establish his value, himself *as good*, by utilising the activity of the nobles and turning it against itself. In brief, the slave can only affirm himself through a derivative and parasitical gesture which denies the very prior creation upon which he relies. And, continuing, we can also with this now grasp why slave morality is 'the *great danger to mankind*.'¹⁴⁶ This is because, being a perversion of an original active force, it

¹⁴² GM: I: SS11

¹⁴³ Metzger, p137

¹⁴⁴ GM: I: SS10

¹⁴⁵ Note the contrast here with other commentators, principally Ridley, who argue that the 'turning creative' of *ressentiment* means 'internalisation', and hence that it is the internalisation of *ressentiment* that allows the slaves to create values, p26. That is, on this view the slaves *are* authentically able to create values, via *ressentiment* and the 'cleverness' it gives rise to.

¹⁴⁶ GM: Preface: SS5

denies and undermines the very thing which we are, and the very thing which is necessary to our higher development. That is, like *Zarathustra's* Last Man this revolt leaches the very soil from which it itself grew, and ensures that 'no longer will a high tree be able to grow from it.'¹⁴⁷¹⁴⁸ However, if we have thereby addressed the essential question of this section, where does this leave us overall? In other words, if we have shown that bad conscience is a constituting perversion and the slave revolt is a contingent and 'secondary' perversion of this, where does this leave our thesis? Put differently, where does it leave our discussion of man *as* a perverse relation to something other than himself and the idea of a non-humanist existentialism?

The answer can be found if we look back to the beginning of our discussion. For there we said that the concrete meaning of man 'as a perverse relation' was for Nietzsche man *as* becoming. That is, we argued that by understanding man as genesis we can see him *as* a perversion of natural forces, and hence not as humanism's independent subject-entity. And further, we set out to do this by looking at man's phylogenesis, how he came to be as a species. Yet we also argued that such a process had typically been understood in a humanist sense. In short, man's species past had been viewed as the settled 'property' of a substantial being; something he 'has' but not something fundamentally that he *is*. Consequently we said that to develop our sense of man *as* perverse we had to overcome this perspective. And we did so, as we have seen, by distinguishing primary and secondary perversions in his genealogy. In other words, we did so by separating the necessary and constituting perversion of bad conscience from the slave revolt as a contingent, subsequent perversion of this. And thus, to answer our question, we can now see how with this we have been able to contribute to our thesis. For in showing how it was thus possible to meaningfully critique an aspect of man's species past we can also show how that past is still 'alive' and 'at stake' within us.¹⁴⁹ That is, with our past 'open' and 'alive', with can recover a sense of ourselves as not merely having a genesis but of *being* this genesis. And thus in this way, with man as a process of continual becoming, we can develop the concrete meaning of man as a perverse relation to

¹⁴⁷TSZ: Prologue:SS5

¹⁴⁸Likewise Poellner focuses on what is objectionable about morality by looking at what is problematic about *ressentiment*. Further, also like our account, he ties this to a certain form of self-deception. Yet, rather than perverse parasitism being at the heart of this it is held to be 'Phenomenal disvalue', p140. That is, a state which if one were fully aware of it, one would not desire to be in. And this, according to Poellner, is something that applies to *ressentiment* to the extent that, seen properly, it has 'rendered itself incapable of recognizing value.' [p141].

¹⁴⁹This is in contrast to Foucault. For, he argues, symptomatically of post-modern, anti-existential readings of Nietzsche, that the 'duty of Genealogy is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present.' M. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* ed. by D.F. Bouchard [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977], p146

alterity. In short, with this idea that he is ‘an imperfect tense that can never become a perfect one’¹⁵⁰, we give form to an existentialism without a substantial subject. That is, we give form to a sense of man without humanism.

¹⁵⁰ F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* trans. by R.J. Hollingdale [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997]: II: SS1, p61

Chapter three: *Sartre's non-humanist existentialism [i] Nothingness and perversity*

ABSTRACT: We have seen that for Nietzsche an existentialism without a subject-entity was possible through understanding man *as* a perverse relation to nature. That is, we saw that a non-humanist 'return to man' was possible by viewing him *as* the perversion of prior and fundamental natural instincts. And further, concretely, he did this in the case of the free spirit and man's species past by looking at his being *as* becoming. In short, we saw man as a perverse relation with both of these by looking at his history and genesis. Yet it is also apparent that this does not in itself demonstrate the main contention of our thesis. For even if Nietzsche's existentialism can be construed in non-humanist terms, this does not necessarily imply anything about the status of other modes of existential thought. In particular, it does not show that *phenomenological* existentialism is not still wedded to the idea of a substantial subject. And thus it does not show, we can say, that one of the major strands of existential thought and hence existentialism in general, is not still humanist.

Consequently it is to refute this claim, and to deepen our understanding of man as perverse, that we now look at the existential phenomenology of Sartre. In other words, we look at Sartre both because he is the most famous figure of that movement, and because the humanist label has been routinely applied to him. But how do we then show that such a labelling is in fact incorrect? We begin by arguing, against Heidegger, that his phenomenology actually does not reveal an independent, 'inner' domain of subjectivity. Rather, what it discloses is man *as* in the world, as never given except as a relation to that world. And this is significant because it implies that man for Sartre is not the distinct subject-entity of humanism.

However, the rest of our chapter will then be concerned with asking in what exactly this relation consists. For, if we cannot show how this claim makes sense, a non-humanist 'return to man' here cannot be defended. Continuing therefore we attempt to ask how man can *be* a relation to the world by first looking at negation as the basis of this. We attempt to show then that man's relation to the world is constituted by real non-being, and further that this can be understood by viewing it as a perverse modification of being. Thus in this way we will argue that man *as* relation to world implies man *as* perversion of the world. Moreover continuing, the final part of our chapter will be concerned then with the concrete meaning of this formulation for man. That is, we will explore first how man as perversion of being implies that he necessarily introduces a perverting non-being to his own past self. Next, we will look

at the conscious manifestation of this perverse self-relation given in the state of angst. As such with this we aim to demonstrate that man *as* perverse relation can be verified in man's concrete experience of existence. And concluding, showing then how man *as* relation to the world makes sense through an analysis of non-being, we can show how Sartre's existentialism is non-humanist.

A. Introduction:

[i] Ontology and humanism

Nietzsche, we saw in our previous chapters, can meaningfully be called an existentialist. That is, as we saw with the free spirit and man's genealogy, he wants philosophy to recapture its goal of allowing man to comprehend his own existence. And further we also witnessed there how such an enterprise was not 'humanist'. This is because if man could be seen *as* a perverse relation to natural forces outside of himself, then he could not be identified with an isolated subject-entity. In other words, if man could be seen *as* a perverse emergence from will-to-power, then Nietzsche could 'return to man' without falling prey to Heidegger's critique of humanism. Yet it is also now apparent that this does not alone demonstrate the central contention of our thesis. For even if Nietzsche's existentialism can be construed in non-humanist terms, this does not necessarily imply anything about the status of other modes of existential thought. In particular, it does not show that *phenomenological* existentialism is not still wedded to the idea of a substantial subject. And thus it does not show, we can say, that one of the major strands of existential thought, and hence existentialism in general, is not still humanist.

As a result, it is to refute this claim, and to show that existentialism as a whole escapes this label, that we now look at the existential phenomenology of Sartre. For, not only is he the defining figure of that movement, but his philosophy is generally derided precisely for being humanist. In other words, as Kaufmann says 'It is mainly through the work of Jean-Paul Sartre that existentialism has come to the attention of a wide international audience.'¹ And thus it behoves us now to investigate a thinker, and a mode of existentialism, which has become so synonymous with the name.² But this of course raises an obvious initial question.

¹ W. Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre* [New York: Meridian, 1956], p40

² Indeed *phenomenological* and specifically Sartrean existentialism is often regarded as the very definition of existential thought. As Warnock, M. Warnock, *Existentialism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970], p1, says, 'We may be content to use the term 'Existentialism' to cover a kind of philosophical activity which

That is, it raises the question of why Sartre specifically is considered a humanist in the first place. And looking back to our introduction we can say that a significant part of the responsibility lies with Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*.³ This is because there Heidegger suggests that Sartre 'does not ask about the relation of Being to the essence of man.'⁴ In different words, he is seen as ignoring a more fundamental question of ontology, and therefore as simply assuming what man 'is' at the most basic level. For in not raising this question, and instead beginning with a describable field called 'consciousness', Sartre assumes man is a certain type of isolatable entity in the world. And it is thus here that for all his radicalism, Sartre remains within the paradigm of humanism's subject entity. In short, as Heidegger says, it is here 'as if the traditional definition of man were indeed to remain basic, only elaborated by means of an existentiell postscript.'⁵

Put another way then, Sartre's philosophy is for Heidegger merely additive. That is, his phenomenological descriptions of bad faith and being-for-others simply add to, provide an 'existentiell postscript' for, the humanist conception but do not essentially challenge it. And it is for this reason then that Sartre has been viewed in these terms. For whether or not Heidegger's 'humanist' reading of Sartre is correct here, the former's influence on post-war philosophical culture ensured the accusation stuck.⁶ But is it in fact correct? Is Heidegger right here when he asserts regarding ontology that 'the basic tenet of [Sartrean] 'existentialism' has nothing at all in common with the statement from *Being and Time*'?⁷ Unfortunately, if we were to answer this by looking at much of the Sartre literature, we might be obliged to conclude that he is.⁸ For throughout studies by Warnock, Morris,

flourished on the Continent especially in the 1940s and 1950s.' In short, in the popular imagination Sartre, and post-war France, epitomises the existentialist movement.

³Sartre is chosen rather than Heidegger for our discussion of phenomenological ontology because the 'humanist' label is routinely applied to the former, and therefore his thought represents a good test case for a non-humanist existentialism. Second, Sartre is also more explicitly than Heidegger identified with the 'existential' label.

⁴M. Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', in *Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. by D.F. Krell [London: Routledge, 1978], p153

⁵*LH*, p166

⁶See T. Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy* [London: Routledge, 1995] especially regarding Derrida's critique of Sartre in 'Les Fins de l'homme', p141.

⁷*LH*, p168

⁸See K. Morris, *Sartre* [Oxford: Blackwell, 2008], pxi-xii, again, for more on the way in which Sartre has been taken less seriously than both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. Note also the general perception of Sartre in the philosophical world, in particular how he is often seen to epitomise the essential limitations of past philosophy, both by analytic philosophers, and 'post-modernists'. As such, [a] Post-modernists: those working in contemporary 'continental' philosophy are inclined to associate Sartre with a romantic and 'modern' vision of philosophy which, for them, has become very much outmoded. As Fox says, Sartre is 'a philosopher of a world that has passed, a child and relic of modernity' N.F. Fox, *The New Sartre* [New York: Continuum, 2003], p1. Note, Fox does not endorse this view but qualifies it, hence the idea of the 'New Sartre', which attempts to link Sartre to the contemporary 'post-modern' concerns of Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze. We can also ask whether, on Heidegger's definition, post-modern 'critiques' of humanism themselves represent an inversion of humanism

Murdoch, and McCulloch⁹ there is almost no mention of Sartre's concern with 'Being'. Instead, we are presented with a philosopher exclusively interested in 'human reality', and 'consciousness'. That is, Murdoch's claim is typical when she says that 'Sartre is a traditional Cartesian philosopher in that an analysis of 'consciousness' is the central point of his philosophy.'¹⁰ In fact many commentaries, unstructured by concern with ontology, read simply as elaborate inventories of aspects of human existence. And this point is observed by Catalano when he remarks that 'the chapters of *Being and Nothingness* are consulted as if they were a series of independent tracts on different subjects.'¹¹

[ii] The absence of the substantial self

Consequently then, these readings unwittingly endorse Heidegger's 'humanist' critique. For by avoiding the question of man's relation to being, they suggest he endorses man as a distinct object of enquiry, and thereby implicitly that he endorses humanism's subject-entity. That is, they re-affirm the image of Sartre as a philosopher of an isolated and romantic consciousness unconcerned with ontology. However, it will be the contention of this chapter that we do not have to see things like that. In other words we will argue that Heidegger and these readings are wrong in attributing to Sartre a humanist view of man. That is, we will argue that an alternative conception of man can instead be uncovered in his thought, and hence with it a non-humanist existentialism. And we will begin to do this by first noting, against Heidegger, that Sartre *was* concerned with Being and ontology. For, as he says toward the end of *Being and Nothingness*, 'My ultimate and initial project...is as we

which therefore still remains humanistic. For there concern is still with the 'human' or 'the subject', but in the form of a negation.

See also A. Dobson, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Politics of Reason* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993] for an 'Old Sartre' reading which sets Sartre up against post-modernism, as the archetypal 'modern' and 'humanist' thinker. Linked to this critique of Sartre is the sense that Sartrean categories such as 'alienation', 'bad faith', 'authenticity', and 'being-for-others', are inextricably tied to an outmoded 'romantic', individual, conception of the subject.

[b]Meanwhile for analytic philosophers, Sartre is often seen to represent many of the worst excesses of 'continental' philosophy: obscure, hyperbolic, self-important, leading many, indeed, to wonder as Morris says, 'is this man to be taken seriously as a philosopher?' [Morris, pix] That said, there are occasional attempts by analytic philosophers to engage more sympathetically with Sartre, see G. McCulloch, *Using Sartre* [London: Routledge, 1994].

⁹ Another good reference point would be *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, edited by C. Howells [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992] in which only one essay focuses on Sartre and 'Being', with most essays instead focused on 'ontic' issues, such as politics, literature and ethics.

¹⁰ I. Murdoch, *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist* [London: Vintage, 1953], p90

¹¹ J. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's 'Being and Nothingness'* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974], pxi. This is also summed up by Morris's admission that the organisation of topics in her commentary 'is in a sense arbitrary', Morris, p23.

shall see, always the outline of a solution of the problem of being...'¹² Yet such an ontology, critically for us, does not proceed by an abstraction from human existence. In short, it avoids Pattison's distinction, used in his critique of Heidegger, between a 'universal ontology' and 'the concrete and immediate situation of individual existence.'¹³ Rather, contra also Barnes's abstract reading of Sartre's ontology,¹⁴ it proceeds by deriving an ontology precisely *from man's concrete experience*. And this is significant because it is then just such a *phenomenological* ontology which will give us Sartre's non-humanist conception of man.

But how, we can ask, does it do this? And indeed isn't an 'ontology' beginning with man a contradiction which simply returns us to the humanism we were trying to escape? Well, to address the second question first we can say that the answer is 'no'. And this is because what we start with is not 'man' as an object of enquiry or knowledge, but with the first person phenomenological experience of living men. In fact, it is the very conflation of these two terms which prevents a proper appreciation of the latter. That is, as Levy points out, 'we misunderstand our own being in the world and take ourselves for disinterested spectators.'¹⁵ Furthermore an authentic recovery of our experience *as it is actually lived* is ontological in so far as, unlike humanism, it precedes any assumptions about what man or being *is*. For, as Heidegger says, 'the term 'phenomenology' expresses a maxim which can be formulated as 'To the things themselves!' It is opposed to all free-floating constructions and accidental findings.'¹⁶ And this means that true phenomenology can open the way for a genuine enquiry into Being. That is, because phenomenology recovers an experience prior to existing ontological assumptions, it can serve as the basis for an unprejudiced exploration of man's relation to being.

However, that is not of course to say that recovering such an experience is necessarily easy. Nor is it something we ordinarily do when we believe we are recalling or describing some episode. For as Husserl had pointed out, awareness of our own experience is

¹² J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by H. Barnes [London: Routledge, 1958], Part IV, Chapter 1. Heidegger in the *Letter on Humanism* simply ignores Sartre's comment regarding 'Being' here when designating Sartre as 'humanist'. In fact he directly quotes Sartre only twice, and both times not from *Being and Nothingness* but from the popular lecture *Existentialism and Humanism*.

¹³ G. Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* [Chesham: Acumen, 2005], p86. Note the distinction he makes between 'the fundamental ontologist and the existential thinker', p87. Pattison also argues, on Kierkegaardian grounds, that universal ontology takes us away from lived existence, and therefore he attempts to turn the Heideggerian critique of humanism on its head.

¹⁴ See H. Barnes, 'Sartre's ontology: The revealing and making of being', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, edited by C. Howells [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992] for an account of Sartre's ontology abstracted from a relation to human existence and also from other aspects of *Being and Nothingness*.

¹⁵ N. Levy, *Sartre* [Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002], p16: he discusses this point in relation to a critique of the scientific viewpoint and its dominance.

¹⁶ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson [Oxford: Blackwell, 1962], p50

systematically distorted by ingrained commonsensical assumptions about the way the world is.¹⁷ And this has at its heart the problem that we project the nature of reflective experience onto *all* experience. That is, since explicit recalling involves reflection, we usually interpret any experience through the lens of the subject-object paradigm of the reflective mode.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the difficulty here is not intractable. And how we are to overcome it is indicated by Sartre, in *Transcendence of the Ego*. This is because, as he says there,

Obviously, we need to resort to concrete experience, and this may seem impossible, since an experience of this kind is by definition reflective, in other words endowed with an *I*. But all unreflected consciousness, being a non-thetic consciousness of itself, leaves behind it a non-thetic memory that can be consulted. All that is required for this is to try to reconstitute the complete moment in which this unreflected consciousness appeared [and this is, by definition, always possible]. For instance, I was just now absorbed in my reading... [Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, p11]¹⁹

In other words then, there is a domain of pre-reflective experience, ‘unreflected consciousness’ which is prior to reflective ‘stepping back’ from the world and the theory it gives rise to. That is to say, there is a mode of experience not involving explicit reflection, as when I am absorbed in an activity, which is given free from prior ontological assumptions. And this can thus serve as the basis for unbiased phenomenological ontology. Secondly though, Sartre also suggests it is possible to recover the nature of such experience without this necessarily being distorted by reflection. For, it is as if originary experience leaves behind a trace, ‘a non-thetic memory’, which lingers in subsequent consciousness like ripples on water. And this means with sufficient effort, and by holding in check our tendency to interpret the experience, we can discern its contours. In short, with sensitivity to certain moments of present consciousness we can recover the pre-reflective without a reflective re-constructive ‘leap’ into a past consciousness. But why, to return, is this significant? How does the possibility of recovering an original pre-reflective experience get us closer to Sartre’s non-humanist conception of man? The answer is that it does so by providing the

¹⁷See E. Husserl, *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy: first book*, trans. by F. Kersten [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982], p51-53 for a discussion of the ‘Natural attitude’ responsible for this.

¹⁸ See also *BT*, p87, regarding the grasping of the world in terms of the ‘relation between subject and object’.

¹⁹ J-P. Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. by A. Brown [London: Routledge, 2004]

starting point for a phenomenological ontology. And we will see how this is the case when we look at what the nature of that starting point is. Put differently we will see how Sartre challenges the humanist subject-entity by looking at what is discovered in this newly opened domain of the pre-reflective.

This is because, continuing, what Sartre uncovers there is that a substantial self or 'I' is absent. For, as he says, 'When I run after a tram, when I look at the time, when I become absorbed in the contemplation of a portrait, there is no *I*.'²⁰ In other words, when we look with sufficient honesty to our pre-reflective experience we find there is no independent subject present. That is, whilst our attachment to the self of the reflective mode makes us want to avoid seeing this,²¹ we do not find, as Gardner puts it, 'something substantial lying *behind* and *supporting* the stream of our consciousness.'²² Rather, in one sense, all we uncover, as Sartre says, is 'consciousness of the *tram-needing-to-be-caught*.'²³ In short, all we find is the consciousness *of* transcendent objects, consciousness *of* the world. And it is thus clear what implications this has for the humanist idea of the subject. For if, as Sartre says, 'there is no consciousness which is not a *positing* of a transcendent object'²⁴, then there is on a fundamental level no distinct or substantial domain of the subject either. That is, if pre-reflective experience of our 'self' reveals only this relation to the world, then the subject-entity of humanism no longer holds. Yet it is also apparent that if the humanist conception of man is with this called into question this is only a starting point for Sartre. This is because he must not merely suggest that the humanist idea of man is wrong, but must put in its place an alternative non-humanist conception. And the first and most obvious problem in this case is what now 'man' for Sartre can mean at all.

Put in other words then, the initial problem here is that 'man' may appear to drop out of the picture entirely. For if phenomenology has revealed that there is only intentional consciousness of objects, that as Poellner says, 'talk of consciousness is an abstraction'²⁵, then how do we distinguish consciousness at all? That is, if there is nothing other than intentional positing of the world then don't we risk simply reducing man to 'world'? The answer, we suggest, is 'no'. And the reason for this concerns the nature of that intentional positing. For a description of pre-reflective experience reveals that this is not merely a

²⁰ *TE*, p13

²¹ It is also because it is hard to make sense of theoretically that we balk at this original intuition.

²² S. Gardner, *Sartre's Being and Nothingness* [New York: Continuum, 2009], p15

²³ *TE*, p13

²⁴ *BN*, pxxvii

²⁵ P. Poellner, 'Early Sartre on Freedom and Ethics' *European Journal of Philosophy* [forthcoming: Published online at *EJP* Early View, April 2012], p3

passive reflection of the world but an activity on it, a 'bringing forth' in relation to it. In different words, we see, as Barnes has observed, that 'Consciousness is real as activity.'²⁶ And what this means then is that even if, as Sartre says, 'consciousness has no 'content''²⁷, it is distinguished by this *active relation*. In other words, even if man exists as *nothing other* than the positing of the world, he nonetheless is distinguished by his very 'positing relation' to it. For, whilst there is no isolated domain of man, he still 'stands out' as the activity of that positing. And this means as such that it is possible to talk about man as exclusively worldly, and there being no separate subject-entity, without dissolving him into that world altogether.

B. Toward a non-humanist conception: the meaning of man as relation

[i] Negation and the question

However, where does this leave us overall in terms of our argument? Where does this point about man *as* active relation leave us in our effort to develop a Sartrean non-humanist conception of man? Well, it represents progress. For we started by saying that the humanist conception could be overcome by developing a phenomenological ontology in Sartre. In other words, we said that an authentic recovery of our lived experience could serve as the starting point to 'think the essence of man more primordially.'²⁸ That is, 'experience' could serve as the basis for grasping man on a level prior to the ontological assumptions of humanism. And further we saw that this was evidenced when a proper description of pre-reflective experience revealed man as only intentional consciousness of the world. This is because we saw there that not only was man not the subject-entity of humanism, but that he could be understood *as* a relation of active positing. In short, we saw that man could both be nothing other than the world, and yet be distinct from it, by being a *relation* to that world. And as such it is apparent that with this we gave the basis for an alternative non-humanist conception of man's being. Yet it is also apparent that this is only a starting point. For if the idea that, as Gardner has observed, 'consciousness *is* a relation'²⁹ allows us to get beyond humanism, this still leaves the question of in what exactly this relation consists.³⁰ In brief,

²⁶ Barnes, p17

²⁷ *BN*, pxxvii

²⁸ *LH*, p168, p169: 'experience the essence of man more primordially'

²⁹ Gardner, p45

³⁰ See also Fox, p149. Fox sets up a dualism between old, 'classical', 'modernist' Sartre and the 'new' Sartre who shares or anticipates many of the themes of post-modernism, most notably that of the dissolution or 'decentring' of the subject. That is, he sees the 'new' Sartre as having got beyond the subject.

this leaves the question of what it means to say that man *is* a relation to the world, rather than just having one. And as such it is the job of phenomenological ontology, and the rest of our discussion, to make sense of this claim.

Put another way then, in order properly to develop Sartre's non-humanist conception of man we must take further steps. For, if we cannot explain concretely how man *as* relation can be rendered theoretically explicable we cannot meaningfully provide an alternative to humanism's subject-entity. And if we cannot do this a non-humanist phenomenological existentialism cannot be defended. But how are we to achieve this? How are we to understand, as Sartre says, the 'relation which we call being-in-the-world'?³¹ The first point to make in answering this question is to note something about phenomenological ontology. For, as Smith has observed in his discussion of Husserlian phenomenology³², its purpose is not merely to describe pre-reflective experience but to outline its constitutional conditions of possibility. And as such what we are here looking for are the *conditions of possibility*, what ontologically must be the case, if we are both to be nothing other than the world and yet distinct from it. That is, we are looking for the ontological conditions of possibility for our pre-reflective intuition of ourselves *as* a non-substantial positing relation to the world. And for Sartre the best starting point in this constitutional analysis is with the conduct of 'the question'. Or, as Hartmann says, 'A phenomenological analysis, as such, would be aimless...were it not for a guiding thread which Sartre discovers in the asking of questions as a pattern of human conduct.'³³

But why, we can ask, does the question provide the 'guiding thread' for our constitutional enquiry into man *as* relation? Why does it provide the starting point for rendering this pre-reflective intuition theoretically explicable as an ontology? Sartre's answer to this question rests upon a further consideration of this pre-reflective experience.³⁴ For as he says, 'this man that *I am*- if I apprehend him such as he is at this moment in the world, I establish that he stands before being in an attitude of interrogation.'³⁵ In other words, if we apprehend ourselves as nothing other than the world, then we also apprehend the manner of our 'standing out' from it *as that of questioning*. That is, in our practical, 'absorbed', dealings

³¹ BN, p4

³² A.D. Smith, *Husserl and the Cartesian Meditations* [London: Routledge, 2003], p34: 'Husserl wants to discover what the conscious life of a subject must intrinsically be like if that subject is to be consciously related to any objects...'

³³ K. Hartmann, *Sartre's Ontology* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966], p45

³⁴ Contra Hartmann, p45, who suggests that 'The selection of this pattern... betrays the presence of an ulterior guiding thread pre-empting the desired result, the negativity of consciousness.' In other words, Sartre's concern with 'non-being', according to Hartmann, provides an ulterior motive for his initial choice of the question.

³⁵ BN, p4

with the world, we find that it is the *activity* of questioning which marks out a distinction on the ground of the world. And as such then an enquiry into man *as* relation proceeds from the question since with this there is an essential distinction from the world which is nonetheless bound up with it.³⁶ In short, we proceed with it because the question is the manifestation in experience of man *as* a non-substantial relation to the world.

Yet, as Sartre asks, ‘What does this attitude reveal to us?’³⁷ How does looking at the question then get us any closer to understanding how man *as* relation is theoretically explicable? To address this issue we must first point out that the question can do this only if we understand it properly. For by ‘the question’ Sartre does not refer simply to a reflective interrogative judgement. That is, he does not refer merely to a reflective judgement, such as we see with the question ‘Should I attend this lecture?’, or to something one person asks another.³⁸ Rather, as he says, whilst ‘the question is formulated by an interrogative judgement...it is not itself a judgement; it is a pre-judicative attitude.’³⁹ In other words, whilst ‘the question’ can be linguistically formulated on the reflective level as a judgement, this is underpinned by a more fundamental ‘conduct’ of questioning. And this more fundamental ‘conduct’ is that of a pre-reflective orientation of consciousness towards the world. That is, it is an orientation which is given, for instance, in the watchmakers ‘questioning’ of a broken watch, or the doctors ‘questioning’ of a potentially broken bone.

This is important to bear in mind, so that we avoid seeing the question in the subject-object terms of the reflective mode. For as Sartre says, the question will allow us to understand man *as* relation, ‘only on the condition that we envisage these forms of conduct as realities objectively apprehensible and not as subjective affects.’⁴⁰ In brief, we must avoid hoisting onto the question prior ontological assumptions about ‘the subject’ if it is to help us make progress. But returning then, how exactly will investigation of the question, properly understood, allow us to do this, and to grasp man *as* relation? To answer this query, we can say, we must follow the phenomenological method. That is, we must begin by describing the conduct of the question and those conditions of possibility which underpin all questioning. For, it is only when we thus understand the constituting conditions for the question that we

³⁶ The question underpins our absorbed relation to the world not, as Gardner suggests, merely our ‘cognitive’ or reflective relation’, p6.

³⁷ *BN*, p4

³⁸ *Ibid*, also p8 ‘the proper nature of the question is obscured by the fact that questions are frequently put by one man to other men’, also see *Being and Nothingness* introduction for reference to consciousness as defined by ‘the question’, *BN* Intro, pxxxviii.

³⁹ *BN*, p4

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

can understand the conditions of possibility for man *as* relation. In short, it is only when we understand the conditions for that experiential manifestation of our non-substantial relation to the world that our original intuition will be rendered theoretically explicable. And it is in this fashion then that Sartre starts his account of the question, by observing that every question involves a three-fold structure. This is because, as he says, ‘Every question presupposes a being who questions and a being which is questioned...’ as well as ‘*That about which I question the being...*’⁴¹ More importantly though, as he goes on to say, every question, as this structure implies, exists as ‘a kind of expectation.’⁴² That is to say, I expect a ‘reply’ from the being in question. So for instance when I ‘question’ whether a door is locked by testing it with my hand, I expect a reply of either ‘yes’, or ‘no’ with regards to its locked status.

But why is this significant? The answer is related to the fact that, as Sartre claims, ‘*That about which I question the being participates in the transcendence of being.*’⁴³ In other words, the locked or unlocked status of the door is not merely a subjective projection but is a real, transcendent, aspect of reality. And this is significant because it reveals that the condition of possibility for the question is what Sartre calls ‘the objective existence of a non-being.’⁴⁴ That is, in order for my questioning relation to being to exist, the possible negation implicit in my question must be as real as the ‘positive’ possibility. And in turn, this is critical because it implies that underpinning the experience of myself *as* a relation to the world is this ‘non-being.’ Put another way, it implies that the idea of *negation* holds the key to rendering a non-humanist, non-substantial conception of man theoretically explicable. For in underpinning the question it also underpins that relation to the world which is distinct from the world, and which *I am*.⁴⁵

[ii] The problem with real negation: non-being and perversion

However, it is also apparent that this cannot represent the end of our enquiry. For if this notion of real negation might show us how man *as* relation is theoretically intelligible, it can do so only once further questions have been answered. In different words, ‘non-being’ can point the way toward a non-humanist conception of man only once it itself has been rendered intelligible. And we can achieve this only by looking at the theoretical criticism of

⁴¹ BN, p4

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ BN, p5

⁴⁵ See also Hartmann, regarding what he calls Sartre’s ‘regressive analysis’. That is, looking for conditions of x in y and y in z, p44-45.

the notion. For we can show how real non-being makes sense by indicating how it avoids the objections made to its intelligibility. That is, we can show how non-being is intelligible, and thus how it renders man *as* relation intelligible, only by seeing what it must be to avoid those criticisms. But what then are these objections? What are those criticisms we need to overcome? The most obvious and fundamental one is that non-being is not in fact 'real'. And this objection can be summed up in the idea that 'negation is only a quality of judgement.'⁴⁶ To explain then, this is the criticism that non-being, as when we discover a door to be *not locked*, is merely the subjective projection of a certain concept. As Sartre says then, this means that 'Negation, the result of concrete psychic operations, is supported in existence by these very operations and is incapable of existing by itself...'⁴⁷ So for instance, when we look in our wallets expecting to find twenty Euros and find only ten, we do not *really* discover the non-being of the twenty, but just the being of the ten. And this means that where negation comes into being it is merely as an extrinsic judgement imposed afterwards. In short, it is a *post-hoc* judgement existing by the contrast between what was expected and what was found, and thus having no real basis in the world.

In other words, therefore, the objection is that negation, like the Stoics' 'lection' or Husserl's noema,⁴⁸ has only a purely nominal or conceptual existence. That is, it exists purely as a way of organising or assessing our ideas. And if true this would then mean that 'negation' could not serve as the basis for understanding man *as* a relation to world. This is because just as a concept it could not exist in any real relation to that world. Yet how then are we to avoid this? How are we to deal with this objection, and thus help render real non-being intelligible? The answer for Sartre, we can say, is two-fold. For firstly, he wishes to disprove the idea that 'ordinary experience reduced to itself does not seem to disclose to us any non-being.'⁴⁹ In other words, he seeks to show that we do in fact encounter real non-being in pre-reflective experience; that it is not merely a concept *projected onto* it. And secondly he intends to use this description of a concrete encounter with objective non-being, to demonstrate a further point. That is, he seeks to use this description as a base for showing how even though 'non-being always appears within the limits of a human expectation'⁵⁰ it is still part of the objective world. In short, he attempts to overcome this objection by showing

⁴⁶ BN, p7

⁴⁷ BN, p6

⁴⁸ See BN, p7

⁴⁹ BN, p7

⁵⁰ Ibid

both *that* non-being is real and, theoretically, *how* such real existence of nothingness is possible.

[iii] Pierre: concrete illustration of non-being

It is to demonstrate both these points that Sartre turns to a particular type of experience. That is, to counter the objection that negation has only a conceptual existence he first looks to a concrete situation where, he believes, we encounter real non-being. And this is the experience of ‘absence’. In other words, Sartre hopes to show by accurately describing this *existentiell* experience, that we do in fact encounter non-being in the world, and that hence nothingness is not merely an empty ‘subjective’ concept. So how then does he begin in this enterprise? He starts, we can say, by giving the example of the absence of a friend we had agreed to meet in a cafe at a particular time.⁵¹ That is, as Sartre famously describes it, he gives the example where, late for a meeting with Pierre, we enter the cafe and look around for him. And investigating the bar, the chairs, the side-booths, we quickly realise he is not there.

The question though, of course, is how we interpret Pierre’s absence here. For a common-sense interpretation of this situation would indicate that we do not really ‘experience’ here any non-being, or indeed any actual ‘absence’, at all. In other words, despite Sartre’s hopes about demonstrating the existence of real non-being, common sense would say there is no discernible ‘non-being of Pierre’ actually seen anywhere. Rather, as Sartre himself acknowledges, even with Pierre’s non-appearance at the allotted time, ‘We seem to have found fullness everywhere.’⁵² For we never encounter a Pierre shaped ‘nothing’ anywhere in the cafe, or in the places where he might have been, but only the full, positive, being of chairs, tables, other customers or of empty space. That is, as Daigle puts it, ‘In-itself, there is only a fullness of being to be found in the cafe.’⁵³ And it follows from this then, that Pierre’s so-called ‘absence’ here can only be a manner of speaking. To say ‘Pierre is absent’, as such, can really just be shorthand for the conceptual inference, ‘Pierre *is* somewhere else’. And further, anything else we might be tempted to associate with ‘absence’ refers merely to entirely subjective, emotional responses. So for instance claims like ‘I was keenly aware of his absence that day’, refer simply to a subsequent subjective feeling.⁵⁴

⁵¹ *BN*, p9. Catalano oddly ignores this famous example in his exegesis of chapter 1 section 2. Similarly Hartmann offers only an inadequate and short discussion of Pierre’s absence.

⁵² *BN*, p9

⁵³ C. Daigle, *Jean-Paul Sartre* [London: Routledge, 2010], p34

⁵⁴ See also Warnock, p93, for view which comes close to this idea of non-being. For, she talks about there being an ‘emotional’ sense of absence.

So how then does Sartre respond to this common sense interpretation of absence? And how thus does he counter the ‘only a concept’ objection and help us make sense of non-being? To understand this, and to grasp Sartre’s own interpretation of Pierre’s absence, it is necessary first to understand what he calls the nature of ‘figure and ground.’⁵⁵ To explain then, against the common sense view, we can say that we never straightforwardly just see in the cafe a series of clearly differentiated, static, ‘objects’ in their fullness. Rather, according to Sartre, and as is the case with all perception, what we ‘see’ in the cafe initially is in fact an undifferentiated totality. That is, we see a sort of amorphous backdrop organised in relation to the potential emergence of Pierre as ‘figure’. For, rather than distinct cups, chairs, and people what we see is an indistinct ‘ground’ organised as not being the figure, as ‘the object of a purely marginal attention.’⁵⁶ And it is this idea, of figure and ground, then which will allow us to understand how ‘absence’ is interpreted for Sartre.

To elaborate on how this is the case further, we can start by saying that the nature of the ‘ground’ is dependent on the status of ‘the figure’ in relation to which it is marginal. What we mean by this is that *how* the ground is given to us will depend on whether the figure, the focus of our attention, is still being searched for, found as present, or found to be absent. So, to return to our example then, we see that when we are searching for Pierre in the cafe we find the figure-ground relation given in a particular way. And we can say that this relation can at this stage be defined in terms of ‘indeterminacy’ and ‘movement’. As Sartre says, explaining, ‘Each element of the setting, a person, a table, a chair, attempts to isolate itself, to lift itself upon the ground constituted by the totality of the other objects, only to fall back once more into the undifferentiation of this ground.’⁵⁷ Continuing from what Sartre implies then, we can say that in so far as I am searching for Pierre what is figure and what is ground is indeterminate. That is, because the figure has not yet emerged, aspects of the potential ‘ground’ fleetingly raise themselves as potentially being the figure. In short they raise themselves as potentially being Pierre before being returned to the marginal totality of the ground as ‘not Pierre’. So, for instance, when I spot a figure near the bar, he is fleetingly ‘raised’ as a possible distinct focus of attention only to collapse again into the undifferentiated ground.

However, this figure-ground relation, defined in its indeterminacy by a ‘movement’ toward an as yet unrevealed figure, would be transformed if we were in fact then to discover

⁵⁵ BN, p9, That we ignore the nature of figure and ground is due to the ‘ontological prejudices’ discussed earlier which encourage us to misinterpret our own experience.

⁵⁶ BN, p10

⁵⁷ BN, p9-10

Pierre. As Sartre says, ‘if I should finally discover Pierre my intuition would be filled by a solid element, I should be suddenly arrested by his face and the whole cafe would organise itself around him as a discrete presence.’⁵⁸ In other words, in terms of figure and ground both movement and indeterminacy would disappear. Instead the ‘ground’ losing its dynamic, self-collapsing, quality, would be organised as a definite and static, albeit marginal, presence now standing in a clear relation to Pierre as figure.⁵⁹ So, to return to our essential concern, what would happen if Pierre were not there? How is the relationship of figure and ground transformed when Pierre on the other hand is not found? Sartre’s answer can be understood in relation to what we have said happens when Pierre *is* found. For just as Pierre’s presence as figure organises the rest of the cafe as a fixed, present, ground, then Pierre’s absence fixes the rest of the cafe on the basis of that absence.

To elaborate then, as Sartre says, ‘his absence fixes the cafe in its evanescence.’⁶⁰ What this means is that the cafe is indeed ‘fixed’, it is no longer in the flow of indeterminacy, but it is fixed in relation to a figure which is *not* there. As Gardner puts it, ‘Pierre’s absence...’fixes the cafe’, which ‘carries’ and ‘presents’ the demanded figure of Pierre.’⁶¹ And this means that in turn the ground which is fixed carries with it everywhere the reference to the ‘evanescent’ collapse between figure and ground. As Sartre emphasises, ‘This figure which slips constantly between my look and the solid real objects of the cafe is precisely a perpetual disappearance.’⁶² In other words, it is the disintegration which determined something as ‘not Pierre’ which is now fixed and given in relation to the entire cafe. And it is as such that, as Sartre says, ‘what is offered to intuition is a flickering of nothingness.’⁶³ That is, the collapse which was, when searching for Pierre, only fleetingly perceived, is now clearly intuited in the shimmering un-fullness, incompleteness, of the cafe. We have been here given an intimation of non-being.

⁵⁸ BN, p10

⁵⁹ Note, then, that Sartre’s point here clearly indicates that the relationship of *figure-ground* in it-self does not give us non-being, even if it is founded on an original non-being, but rather it is only in the ‘construction’ of the ground that non-being is, fleetingly, apprehended. That is, it is only in the *movement* from potential figure to ground that non-being is intuited. For, up to this point our intuition of non-being is not substantial or ‘fixed’ enough fully to reveal itself, or to serve Sartre’s purposes in terms of an *existentiell* state which can reveal concrete non-being fully to us.

⁶⁰ BN, p10

⁶¹ Gardner, p64

⁶² BN, p10

⁶³ Ibid

[iv] 'Transformation' as a means to understanding non-being

Where does all this leave us though? What can we now say, given that an analysis of figure and ground has revealed Pierre's absence as an actually experienced intimation of real non-being? The answer is multifaceted. To start off with, and to return to our most immediate concern, this description of absence is a rebuttal to the 'common sense' interpretation and its claim that we never really 'see' any absence in the cafe at all. That is, with an understanding of figure and ground, Sartre's phenomenological description of the cafe undermines the naive assumption that 'the cafe is a fullness of being.'⁶⁴ For it undermines the idea that all we ever 'see' there are a series of fully present objects. Admittedly of course, that is not to say that we straightforwardly 'see' Pierre's absence either. Put differently, we do not 'see' this absence if by this it is meant, as Sartre says, 'that I discover his absence in some precise spot in the establishment.'⁶⁵ But what Sartre shows is that absence is nonetheless given. In other words, against the common sense interpretation, our analysis has shown that absence is real, and is uncovered in the cafe as a whole. For, as we have seen, this absence of Pierre is everywhere, uncovered as the strange indeterminacy of the cafe. That is, it is uncovered in the now observable gap between the objects as figure and ground; Pierre's absence not permitting them to settle as either.

Yet how does this help with our more general enquiry? How does this help us understand how real non-being is intelligible and hence how man *as* relation, with non-being as the basis of that relation, can be rendered theoretically explicable? The answer is that we have not yet reached that point. That is, we have not yet shown how non-being fully makes sense, and how then its meaning discloses the ontological meaning of man as non-substantial relation to the world. For, whilst we have in part addressed the main objection to its intelligibility, another significant question remains to be answered. That is to say, that whilst we have shown how non-being is given in experience, and thus is not merely a concept, we have not shown how this experience in fact corresponds to anything actual in the world. In short, we have not yet shown how this experienced non-being can be more than subjective and is part of 'the structure of the real'?⁶⁶ And consequently, we can say, it is in order to make real negation fully explicable, and to disclose the meaning of man *as* relation, then that we must now address this question.

⁶⁴ BN, p10

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ BN, p7

But how in turn are we to do this? How do we show, contra McCulloch, that our experience of non-being refers to more than just ‘the way things seem to be’?⁶⁷ Well, we can start by reconsidering the example of Pierre in the cafe. For it is apparent that the non-being we experience there with his absence is, in that instance, not experienced by simply anyone. As Sartre says, ‘Pierre’s absence supposes an original relation between me and this cafe; there is an infinity of people who are without any relation with this cafe for want of a real expectation which establishes their absence.’⁶⁸ In different words, we only experience Pierre’s absence as a ‘real’ aspect of the cafe because we were initially expecting him. In contrast, for someone without this expectation no particular non-being in the cafe would be intuited or present itself.⁶⁹ However, for Sartre at least, this fact is not as much a problem as it might appear. That is to say, the ‘individual’ nature of this experience of non-being does not mean that the non-being itself which is disclosed lacks objectivity. In short, its individual character and its dependence on a contingent expectation, does not mean, as Sartre says, that it is ‘reduced to pure subjectivity.’⁷⁰

To understand how this can be the case though, it is necessary to consider more closely the exact purpose and status of Sartre’s description regarding Pierre. Here an appreciation of Heidegger’s *existentiell*-existential division is illuminating. For, the purpose of Sartre’s description of the *existentiell* experience of absence in the cafe is not to describe a non-being which is always in that precise way given to everyone. Rather, as a significant *existentiell* state, its purpose is to point towards a more fundamental ontological or ‘existential’ condition of Being-in-the-world. And this means, in turn, the purpose of the description is to point towards an ontological structure of Being more generally. As such, when Sartre says that ‘Pierre absent haunts this cafe and is the condition of its self-nihilating organisation as ground’⁷¹ his point is not that Pierre’s specific absence is a condition for any experience of the cafe. On the contrary, he is saying that non-being in general, linked to human expectation, is a condition for that experience, and for the possibility of negation. In other words, as Sartre puts it, ‘The necessary condition for our saying *not* is that non-being be a perpetual presence in us and outside of us, that nothingness haunt being.’⁷² And what

⁶⁷ McCulloch, p7: He interprets Sartre as suggesting that non-being only is ‘real’ in the sense that it figures in experience as a psychological or subjective reality.

⁶⁸ BN, p10

⁶⁹ See also Warnock, p95, for a discussion of the difference between ‘real’ and ‘arbitrary’ absence. So for instance in the latter case ‘Napoleon is not here’ is an example of arbitrary, conceptual, absence.

⁷⁰ BN, p7

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² BN, p11

this means, in terms of Sartre's example, is that though based on an individual experience it reveals a condition of experience in general. That is, whilst non-being is only explicitly revealed *ontically* to human beings in certain instances like absence, these states disclose a more general feature of any being-in-the-world.

Returning therefore to our question of 'objectivity' we are now in more of a position to give an answer. And this goes as follows. From what we have argued, we can say that even though any experience of non-being is relative to a subjective expectation, the existence of non-being in general as a condition for all experience is not. In other words, whilst the particular experience of absence is subjective, its dependence on some form of non-being isn't. For no experience of the cafe, on a fundamental level, is possible without *some* non-being haunting it. Yet, we may ask, does this still not leave a further question of 'objectivity' untouched? For even if non-being is a fundamental condition of all experience, not restricted to particular individuals at particular times, can we not still question whether it is part of the 'real' world as such? In different words, if as Sartre concedes 'non-being always appears within the limits of a human expectation'⁷³, then isn't it still cut off from 'objective' reality? That is, if it could not exist 'independently' of man isn't it still ultimately subjective?

For Sartre the answer is a definitive 'no'. And returning to our central concern, it is his answer to this which allows us to see both how real non-being is theoretically explicable and how we can thus understand man *as* relation. In brief, it is by seeing what must be possible so that non-being can be both based on human expectation *and* still objective that we will uncover a non-humanist conception of man. For we see what is necessary here is that man does not merely passively experience Being. That is, he does not passively relate to it as something immutably just there, rather he actually transforms and 'perverts' it. And what he transforms is what would otherwise be the inert and undifferentiated in-itself. For as Sartre says of being, '...in order for it to parcel itself into differentiated complexes which refer to one another and can be used it is necessary that negation rise up...' ⁷⁴ In other words, it is necessary that non-being is imposed by man on being so that it can be differentiated and recognisable as a world. And it is then clear how this answers our question regarding objectivity. For if non-being is a 'limiting cutting into Being by a being' ⁷⁵, then it can both be dependent on man *and* a real part of the world. In different words, if this transformation which is non-being is a real change 'carved into' the structure of being itself, rather than

⁷³ BN, p7

⁷⁴ BN, p24

⁷⁵ BN, p8

projected onto it, then we need not see it as subjective. And thus we will have answered with this the central objection to the intelligibility of real non-being.

[v] Conclusion: man as perverse relation

Yet didn't we also say that in addressing this question we would be able to address the central concern of our chapter? Didn't we say, that is, that in explaining how non-being can be both dependent on man and yet objectively part of the world we would be able to grasp a non-humanist conception of man? We did. And to understand how this is the case we need, as Sartre says, to 'cast a glance backward'⁷⁶ to the start of our discussion. For we began there by saying we could avoid the ontological assumption of humanism, that man is a mode of substantial entity, by looking at pre-reflective experience. In other words, we said we could by-pass the assumption implicit in its enquiry into man as a distinct object of knowledge, by describing an experience existing prior to reflective theory. And what we found there did in fact undermine the humanist presumption. This is because, properly described, pre-reflective experience revealed no substantial self, independent of the world. That is, as Gardner puts it, 'we do not as a matter of phenomenological fact, encounter an 'I' in 'first order' or '*unreflective consciousness*.'⁷⁷ Instead what we found was only intentional awareness of transcendent objects. In short, we discovered that we were nothing other than the world and yet somehow a relation to it. We intuited, put differently, that we existed *as* a positing relation to that world; as having no 'substance' distinct from it, yet still as 'standing out' from it.

However, the problem for our chapter was then how we rendered this intuition theoretically intelligible. That is, the problem was how we made this intuition of ourselves *as* a non-substantial relation to the world, as nothing other than world yet not world make sense. For, if we wish to develop a non-humanist conception of man, it is not enough that we have a vague pre-ontological 'sense' of this meaning. Rather we must be able to show how philosophically this revelation, which seems so counter to ordinary theory, can be defended and *understood*.⁷⁸ And our first step toward doing this was with 'the question'. This was because the question, grasped as a pre-reflective orientation rather than as a judgement,

⁷⁶ *BN*, p21

⁷⁷ Gardner, p12

⁷⁸ See also *BN*, pxxiv, where Sartre discusses 'Boredom' and 'Nausea' as giving us 'immediate access to Being.' For it is also clear that this 'immediate access' cannot in-itself suffice.

appears as Sartre says, to ‘reveal to me the relation of man with the world.’⁷⁹ In other words, the question was chosen because it represented a relation to the world which nonetheless, without any separate substance, ‘stands out’ from it. And continuing therefore, looking into this to grasp the meaning of man *as* relation, we uncovered real negation. That is, we saw that underpinning the question, and hence man as essentially worldly yet distinct from the world, was non-being as something real. And this in turn indicated a solution to our problem. For if negation was *real* then it could be a relation that was part of the world, yet, as its contradiction, a non-substantial standing out from it. In short, if there was non-being existing ‘parasitically’ on the world, we could have the *being* of a relation that did not require anything existing ‘behind’, ‘on the other side of’, that relation.

Yet if, as Salvan says, non-being then ‘provides us with the key to his [Sartre’s] philosophy’⁸⁰ it also, we saw, presented a new problem. For, if the idea of non-being indicates how man *as* a non-substantial relation to world can be intelligible, it does so at the cost of a new question of intelligibility. In other words, it does so by raising the question of how then we can make sense of real non-being. This is because, as Sartre argues, ‘one will say that in this case the fact simply refers me to my subjectivity.’⁸¹ That is, it will be claimed that non-being can make sense only as a subjective concept or projection. And this is particularly because, as Sartre description of Pierre’s absence acknowledges, non-being is always dependent on human expectation. However this is where our recent discussion of modification comes in. For if as we argued non-being is a real transformation of being by man, actually destabilising undifferentiated full being, then this apparent contradiction can be reconciled. That is to say, if ‘Man’s *relation* with being is that he can modify it’⁸² then non-being can be both part of the world *and* dependent on man. And if this is the case then we can see how this answers the question of a non-humanist conception of man. This is for the reason that with this idea of modification we will then have shown how real non-being is intelligible, and hence how man *as* relation to the world can be theoretically understood. In different words, we will have shown how if man *is* the modification of being that is non-being then he can both possess no substance distinct from the world and yet not be reducible to it.

However, this notion can in turn be understood, we can say, only in terms of ‘perversion’. That is, looking back to our thesis, we see that the modification which man

⁷⁹ BN, p4

⁸⁰ J. Salvan, *To Be and Not To Be* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962], p11

⁸¹ BN, p5

⁸² BN, p24

brings to the world and which he *is*, can only be grasped as a perverse turning against itself of being. For if that modification we have discussed is merely a 'variation' on full being then we end up with man as a *mode* of world. In other words, if this modification is conceived in terms of an ordinary development or change, then man once more becomes an independent entity outside, 'on', the world. And thus, in the same way man is envisaged as a special 'modification' of the animal,⁸³ we risk returning again to the distinct substance of humanism. Consequently the modification of non-being must be conceived not as a *variation of* but as a destabilising *subversion of* being. That is, as Sartre says, 'Nothingness must be given at the heart of Being',⁸⁴ as that which haunts being. And this is possible, we can say, only if this modification is a perversion. For, the modification can remain 'coiled in the heart of being-like a worm',⁸⁵ only if the modification is necessarily always bound up with the original in its very act of changing it. In short, it can remain at the heart of being only by existing 'as essentially turned against itself.'⁸⁶ For it can exist this way only by being a perversion which necessarily evokes the thing it tries to deny in the very act of attempting to escape it.

C. Concrete non-humanist conception: *meaning of man as perverting relation*

[i] Detachment from self and world

Consequently with this we have, on one level, answered the question with which we began. That is to say, through this idea of perverse modification we have rendered theoretically intelligible our pre-reflective intuition of man's existence as non-substantial. For, if man *is* the perversion of being which is non-being then he can possess no substance 'behind' the world, yet still exist as ontologically distinct from it. In other words, if man discovers himself *as* a strange dissonance on the surface of the world, *as* intimated by it, then he can have a being without being a subject-entity. And in this way our central concern is addressed. That is, in this way we have seen both how our intuition of ourselves *as* a relation can be understood, and how thus a non-humanist view of man can be developed. However, it is also evident that this cannot represent a terminus of our enquiries. This is because our account so far has only given an incredibly *abstract* answer to what man is. In different words, we have said that 'man *is* the being who perverts being', a perverse, modifying

⁸³ See *LH*, p154

⁸⁴ *BN*, p22

⁸⁵ *BN*, p21

⁸⁶ S. Mulhall, *Philosophical Myths of the Fall* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005], p119

relation to being, but we have not said more concretely what this means in man's existence.⁸⁷ That is, we have not said what this formulation implies for man's *actual* experience of himself and the world. And thus it is to this question now we must look. For not only must existential ontology concern itself with the concrete implications of its claims, but it must ensure those claims are themselves developed through what is actually given in concrete experience. In short, it must connect this ontology to man's concrete existence, in order both to understand better and to verify the ontological claims earlier made.

Yet how are we to do this? How are we to ask 'what is the original relation of the human being to nothingness?'⁸⁸, and avoid the abstraction from existence implicit in Barnes' interpretation of non-being?⁸⁹ To answer this question, Sartre suggests, it is helpful to look again at the nature of 'the question' discussed at the beginning of our enquiry. For by examining this we are given an indication of what man's perverting activity implies for his concrete existence. Casting our thoughts back then, we said that 'every question in essence posits the possibility of a negative reply.'⁹⁰ What this means is that every question, considered as a questioning *of* being,⁹¹ allows for the possibility, in relation to what is questioned, that a 'nothing' is revealed. And this point for Sartre has significant consequences for our present topic. As he says, '...from the very fact that we presume that an Existent can always be revealed as *nothing*, every question supposes that we realise a nihilating withdrawal in relation to the given...' ⁹² In other words, in order to question a being, it is necessary that we put the given, the established expected order of being,⁹³ into 'brackets'. That is, it is necessary that we enact a 'nihilating withdrawal' putting that being in a state of indeterminacy. And this withdrawal, we can say, represents a 'break' in the established order of the world, a holding 'out of play' of the being in question.

Furthermore, it is this point which now helps with our initial question. That is, viewing the perversion of being as a 'break' in this way, holds the key to understanding what is concretely implied for man by his ontological status. For, as Sartre explains, 'in so far as

⁸⁷ Note also, Catalano argues that *Being and Nothingness* itself is structured by a movement 'from the abstract to the concrete', pxi

⁸⁸ BN, p22

⁸⁹ Barnes, p22-23, treats Sartre's ontology, and specifically the issue of non-being, as distinct from man's actual experience and existence. In particular, she does not develop the radical implications of man being 'non-being' for a conception of man, and related to this does not explore the nature of man's self-detachment or his awareness of this in 'angst.'

⁹⁰ BN, p22

⁹¹ That is, considered not as a mode of dialogue, but as the 'questioning of being' or a being, see earlier discussion of the question'.

⁹² BN, p23

⁹³ For instance, if it were a tool, it's usual functioning such as the expectation that the key will turn in the lock.

the questioner must be able to effect in relation to the questioned a kind of nihilating withdrawal, he is not subject to the causal order of the world; he detaches himself from Being.⁹⁴ In different words then, in so far as man is able to enact a 'break' within the world, he must at the same time separate *himself* from world. That is, if he puts the being in question 'out of play', he must put himself likewise 'out of play' in relation to the being questioned. And this is because the question itself cannot be determined but must be unmotivated. Elaborating again this point, man can only 'question', and enact this break from the causal order in being, because the question is itself unmotivated. In short, he can do this only because the question cannot be determined by any prior positive being. And further, as Sartre tries to make clear, the question can only be unmotivated in this way if the being *questioner* has 'the permanent possibility of dissociating himself from the causal series which constitutes being.'⁹⁵ For, the unmotivated cause of the question, which is a break in being, can only be that which has already detached itself from being. That is, it can only be a being, man, who has already separated himself from the causal order of the world.

Yet we can ask, does this represent progress regarding the implications for man's concrete existence? Or aren't we just back here with the idea of man as 'standing out' from world? That is, aren't we simply back with our earlier notion that perversion allows for a being related to but ontologically distinct from world? In one sense, the answer is 'yes'. But it is also the case that this examination of the question and man as a 'break' helps us see a further point regarding his existence. For if we understand this 'break' of non-being properly then it implies a necessary self-relation for him. In other words, if we see it not as an empty 'gap or separation'⁹⁶ but as a 'parasitical' being *on the ground of* that from which we are 'detached', then a new existential relation is disclosed. For as Sartre says, explaining, '....human reality can detach itself from the world - in questioning...only if by nature it has the possibility of self-detachment.'⁹⁷ And the reason why a 'break' from the world also implies a break from self relates to the nature of nihilation and of nothingness. This is because one can be separate from the world, and exist as a non-being in relation to it, only on the basis of the nihilation of a prior concrete being. So for instance, the being questioned can be 'put out of circuit'⁹⁸ from the world only through the nihilation of a prior full being in relation to which *it* can possess the 'borrowed being' of the 'non'. Equally then, the same

⁹⁴ BN, p23

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Warnock, p93, 'a gap or separation which lay between man and world'

⁹⁷ BN, p25

⁹⁸ BN, p24

logic applies to man's being. For it follows that for man to be separated from the world and constituted as a perversion of it that is non-being, he must exist as the nihilation of a prior full being. And this prior being in relation to which he can acquire the borrowed being of non-being is his own self.

In short therefore, it follows that in order that man be able to 'bring out of himself the possibility of a non-being'⁹⁹, he must be separated from himself. That is, in order to exist *as* that which perverts being he must not only be separated from the world, but must pervert and detach himself from a prior sense of a real self. And it is thus that we have now observed here a partial answer to our initial question. For we have observed, regarding the implications of man *as* perversion of being for his concrete existence, that he must stand in a certain relation of absence to his own self. In other words, we have seen, as Sartre puts it, that 'human consciousness [is] a sort of escape from the self...' ¹⁰⁰ And in this way we have seen that our being defining, perverting activity determines us as perpetually fleeing from ourselves. However, it is also clear why this answer we have given is still only partial and preliminary. For, whilst we have given an initial indication of the implications of Sartre's ontology for concrete existence, this has itself only been an abstract outline. In different words, we have yet to address, in anything but the most abstract terms, what it means for man to 'flee himself', and what 'self' it is that he flees. And it is thus to these questions then that we now turn.

So, addressing these queries then, we can ask first: what is this concrete self which man 'nihilates' and from which he flees in order to bring non-being into the world? Sartre initially indicates an answer to this question in terms of 'temporality'. ¹⁰¹ For, as he says, '...we are envisaging the condition of the nihilation as a relation to the self in the heart of a temporal process.'¹⁰² In other words, the concrete being which is nihilated in man and constitutes his separation from his own self is that temporal aspect of his being which is *past*. And it is this which in turn constitutes the next step in grasping the concrete implications of man *as* perversion of being. Yet we can say, it can do this only if we grasp the nature of this 'flight from past' properly. That is, it must be understood on the basis of the non-being we

⁹⁹ BN, p23

¹⁰⁰ BN, p25, See also Sartre's comment there about 'the trends of contemporary philosophy' which appeal to this idea, principally in relation to Heidegger, Husserl and Brentano.

¹⁰¹ For more on why Sartre comes to focus on 'temporality' see p25. Note also that the question of 'freedom' which Sartre views as being another way of talking about the break from self and world will be put in parentheses. This is because it is dealt with more thoroughly in part IV of *Being and Nothingness*, and because it may confuse our current understanding of non-being.

¹⁰² BN, p25

have already outlined and not in a way, to borrow Heidegger's phrase, that is, 'ontologically inappropriate.'¹⁰³ For the relation to the past here cannot be viewed as a pure escape, or freedom, from past consciousness. Rather, as Sartre says, 'The prior consciousness is always *there* [though with the modification of 'pastness']. It constantly maintains a relation of interpretation with the present consciousness...'¹⁰⁴

What this means then is that we are not talking about a pure or abstract freedom from his past. Instead, the point is that, as Sartre indicates, man's being is a real, and specific, relation of non-being to that past.¹⁰⁵ Man has not annihilated his own past that is, but emerged as a 'modification' of it. And nor are we to see this, as Morris does, as meaning that man is then a dualistic 'composite' of his past and transcendence of that past, as different 'parts' of him.¹⁰⁶ For, rather, man still *is* his past, he has no other substance beside it, but he exists this past as he does the world, in the parasitical mode of the 'not'. In different words, he exists *as* the collapse and movement away from the full being of his particular past, and in the 'borrowed being',¹⁰⁷ of the 'non'. Furthermore, to return, it is this point which then allows us to understand man's being more concretely. That is, it is in viewing this 'flight from past' in the proper fashion we can now see more fully what the concrete implications of man's being *as* perversion are. For we started by saying that man's being as a perverse modification of being implied man's detachment from the world. We then said though that in order that man bring destabilising non-being to being individual men had to nihilate a concrete, full being in relation to themselves. In other words, they had to detach themselves from the specific full being of their own past. And thus now we can see how with this 'detachment from past' we have a more concrete sense of the meaning of man *as* perverse modification of world. For, we can say now that man is not just the perversion of the world but the perverse modification of his own past self as well. That is, put better, nihilation of world for the specific man *is* nihilation of his past self; the dissonance of the world is given *as*, through, his own perverse flight from self. And it thus now with this that a more concrete sense of man's being *as* perverse modification is indicated.

¹⁰³ *BT*, p86

¹⁰⁴ *BN*, p28

¹⁰⁵ As we saw in the discussion of Pierre's absence from the café, and of '*negatites*' in the world, 'abstract' negation is different from real non-being. This is because only the latter emerges on the basis of a concrete being. So, for instance, man is also *not* any number of beings or pasts, he is not a chair, but this 'not' has no real existence and stands in no real relation to him, unlike the 'not' of his own past.

¹⁰⁶ Morris, p80: She interprets the formulation 'man is not what he is' to mean man 'is not confined to the first terms in these dualities; it is not *only* what it [he] is.' [p80]

¹⁰⁷ *BN*, p22

[ii] Angst: concrete consciousness of man's non-being

Yet, it is also clear that this point itself cannot be a terminus of our discussion either. For if the idea that man is a perverse relation to his own past gives a more concrete sense of the meaning of man *as* perverse relation to world, then it remains still far too abstract. That is, it is a formulation that still remains detached from man's actual experience of himself and the world. Consequently, it is in order to address this, and develop a more concrete sense of Sartre's conception of man, that we now look to the actual consciousness of his self-relation. In other words, it is to make that abstract implication for man of our initial formulation more concrete that we now ask how the former is manifest in lived experience. But how in turn are we to do this? How are we to uncover this lived consciousness of our being *as* perverse relation to past self and world? The first point to note in answering this is that for Sartre such a consciousness must necessarily exist; consciousness 'must necessarily be conscious of this cleavage in being...' ¹⁰⁸ That is, consciousness cannot passively have this nihilation as *part* of its being, like the constitution of our blood, without our being aware of it. And this is because consciousness, as we have seen, is defined by its *activity*. In different words, since consciousness must continually itself enact the perversion of self and world, and experience itself only in this, it must have awareness of this process. ¹⁰⁹ And this means, as Sartre says, that '...we ought to be able to define...a constant mode of consciousness, present *qua* consciousness, which would be consciousness of nihilation.' ¹¹⁰

However, to ask our next question, in what exactly does this consciousness consist? What is this experiential state in which man is thus aware of his own self-nihilation? According to Sartre, the answer can be found in 'angst.' ¹¹¹ For following Kierkegaard and Heidegger ¹¹², he claims that it is this *existentiell* state in which man is conscious of 'being both this past and this future and as not being them.' ¹¹³ In short, it is this state in which man apprehends himself *as* that which modifies being by a perverting flight from his past self. And further Sartre attempts to show why this is the case and what he means by this state, through a concrete description of a paradigmatic case where it occurs. That is, he attempts to

¹⁰⁸ BN, p28

¹⁰⁹ See also the Introduction to *Being and Nothingness* for Sartre's argument on this point. For Sartre, as is made clear here, there must be a transparency of consciousness, and consciousness could not possess a characteristic of its being which was somehow not in some way itself *conscious*, or immanent in consciousness. Just as analogously for 'pain' to exist there must be consciousness of pain.

¹¹⁰ BN, p29

¹¹¹ Note the various other possible translations of angst: 'anguish', 'anxiety' or 'dread', see Macquarrie, J. Macquarrie, *Existentialism* [New York: Penguin, 1972], p164-165.

¹¹² See, BN, p29

¹¹³ BN, p29

show how in angst there is consciousness of our non-being by describing that experience we know as vertigo. For, whilst we may have a vague sense of what 'angst' means, perhaps associated with the idea of anguished 'despair' over something, Sartre requires a more precise definition. And it is therefore to get this that we now look to that example. In brief, it is to explain how in angst we have an apprehension of our being *as* perverse relation to world and self that we look to the case of the man on the precipice.

To elaborate then, Sartre takes that recognisable example as an instance where vertigo as a mode of angst is likely to occur. For, as he says, 'I am on a narrow path - without a guard-rail which goes along a precipice.'¹¹⁴ That is, I am in a situation where my life is potentially threatened by a possible fall. At first, though, in this instance, argues Sartre, we do not immediately experience anguish in relation to this possibility. Rather, anguished vertigo occurs only as a development out of an initial fear, 'Vertigo announces itself through fear.'¹¹⁵ And it is for this reason that Sartre thus begins by describing the nature of this fear. As he describes it then, it is '...the apprehension of myself as a destructible transcendent in the midst of transcendents, as an object which does not contain in itself the origin of its future disappearance.'¹¹⁶ In other words, what we fear is falling over the precipice and dying, and we do so in so far as we apprehend ourselves as an object in the world. That is, our fear is based on the sense that, as an 'object', we are subject to the effects of other transcendents, like the stone I can slip on or the crumbling path. And thus being subject to this our fear is based on the sense that we are potentially subject to annihilation coming from outside of us.

Yet we can say, such a state is not stable. On the contrary, suggests Sartre, it is this very fear, that of becoming a mangled transcendent in the depths of the ravine, which is self-disintegrating. And it is so because it provokes a movement towards anguished vertigo. What this means is that my fear of what might happen, and my apparent powerlessness in the face of this, causes me to try and seize control of the situation. It causes me to adopt, that is, what Catalano calls 'an attitude of care.'¹¹⁷ For, as Sartre says, explaining, 'My reaction will be of the reflective order; I will pay attention to the stones in the road; I will keep myself as far as possible from the edge of the path.'¹¹⁸ In other words, I will attempt to summon up possible conducts which allow me to transcend my vulnerability as a transcendent, and ensure my safety. And this means that I escape fear by summoning my 'positive' possibilities. That is, as

¹¹⁴ BN, p30

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ Catalano, p70

¹¹⁸ BN, p30

Sartre emphasises, 'I escape fear by... placing myself on a plane where my own possibilities are substituted for the transcendent probabilities where human action had no place.'¹¹⁹

But how is this connected to Sartre's notion of 'angst'? How is awareness of these positive possibilities linked to apprehension of myself *as* a perverting modification of self and world? Sartre's answer, in terms of his description, depends upon understanding what is necessary for the possibility of safe conduct to be summoned in the first place. And it is helpful here to think back to our account of Pierre and the café. For just as there we began by distinguishing between the undifferentiated 'ground' of the café and Pierre as figure, so now do we observe that the 'desired' safe conduct arises only via a 'ground' of possible conducts. That is, we begin by noting that the 'positive' possibility we wish to summon can only be brought to awareness from out of an amorphous totality of other possible conducts. Or, as Sartre says, 'The possibility which I make *my* concrete possibility can appear as my possibility only by raising itself on the basis of the totality of the logical possibilities which the situation allows.'¹²⁰ However, such a possibility can be thus 'raised' only by a specific means. For, as with my attempt to determine potential figures as Pierre, I raise my possibility of 'safe conduct' only by nihilating the other, non-prudent, possibilities as 'not-to be pursued.'¹²¹ And it is this point which will be critical to our understanding of Sartre's description of angst.

This is because, to explain, I *cannot avoid* such negation in that situation. For, I cannot summon my desired conduct through an act of pure 'positivity', uncovering it in isolation, without engaging and nihilating the non-desired conducts. Put another way, I can only realise my 'positive' possibility like a statue from marble; through first determining what is 'to be taken away.' And it is this then which points towards an understanding of how angst exists here. That is, it is this point which provides the key to grasping how desire for safe conduct on the precipice leads to an apprehension of our fundamental being. For if the attempt to summon a desired possibility necessitates a negation of contradictory possibilities, such as suicide, then we must experience those as *real*.¹²² That is, if, as Sartre says, 'I

¹¹⁹ BN, p30

¹²⁰ BN, p31

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Salvan's discussion of the precipice involves no mention of such non-possibles [p18-19]. There is also generally an absence in the literature of any extended discussion of angst, and virtually none on Sartre's example of vertigo on the precipice. So for instance Gardner makes no mention of it. Likewise Webber, J. Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre* [New York: Routledge, 2009], only dedicates one line to a discussion of 'anguish' [p74]. And he does not tie this into Sartre's ontology and the question of non-being, but to the freedom to change one's character. In a similar manner Desan, W. Desan, *The Tragic Finale* [New York: Harper and Row, 1960] affords only a couple of lines to an exploration of angst. [p21].

engage myself in them; in order to cause *my* possibility to appear'¹²³, then this possibility is no longer 'hypothetical'. For there suicide, in my negation of it, becomes not an abstract potentiality, something hypothetically '*one* could do' on a precipice. Rather it becomes something just as real or possible for me as safe conduct. And it this in turn which is the significant point for our discussion. This is because if we apprehend the counter-possible as real, as alive, then we grasp that we do not merely have those possibilities, but that we *are* those possibilities. In other words, we apprehend in seeing the counter-possible as *real*, that our future is radically indeterminate, and that as such possibility itself is constitutive of our being. In short we apprehend, as Sartre says, that 'I am already what I will be...*I am the self which I will be, in the mode of not being it.*'¹²⁴

Yet why, to return to our original point, is this significant? Why if our necessary negation of counter-possibles leads to an awareness of ourselves *as* possibility does this mean the situation on the precipice is one of angst? That is, why does this apprehension lead to a consciousness of my fundamental being *as* a perverting relation to being and self? The first part of an answer to this is centred on the latter part of this formulation. For if, as Sartre says, 'Anguish is precisely my consciousness of being my own future, in the mode of not-being'¹²⁵ then I experience the inefficacy of my past to determine that future. In different words, if I genuinely apprehend myself *as* possibility, then I must be aware of my radical break from all past being. And it is this that means I must be aware of my being as a flight from the full concrete being of my past self. However, this is not all. For, whilst as Macquarrie says 'anxiety is, in a special way, revelatory of the human condition,'¹²⁶ it is also revelatory of that condition as bound up with the world. In other words, my apprehension of self *as* possibility, and hence flight from self, is at the same time an apprehension of our essential relation to the world. And this is because in apprehending myself *as* possibility I apprehend that first I exist *as* a relation to the world. In brief, since possibility only occurs through the world when I apprehend that I am nothing other than possibility I also must apprehend myself as having no being except through world.

Continuing moreover, this in turn means we apprehend ourselves as a perverting, transforming relation to the world. For if we are bound to the world then the world must be bound to us. And if the relation we bring to bear in our being is possibility, then this implies a

¹²³ BN, p31

¹²⁴ BN, p32

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Macquarrie, p165, does not develop the relation between non-being and angst. That is, he does not look at angst from an ontological perspective.

relation of indeterminate transformation is brought to the world. In short, if we apprehend ourselves *as* possibility we apprehend that we exist as that non-being which is a perverting modification of world. And this means, as Caws puts it in less technical terms, that man here realises that the world's apparent 'order and stability were its [his] own creation.'¹²⁷ That is, in apprehending ourselves as constituted by possibility we glimpse the radical contingency of the world. For we glimpse that with true awareness of our possibilities that it is our radical freedom, the contours of our existence in relation to the world, that gives to it all structure and meaning.¹²⁸ And it is thus that we can say awareness of ourselves *as* possibility is what then allows for angst. In short, it is through this that we apprehend our ontological status *as* a perverting, fleeing, relation to world and self.

D. Conclusion: *Angst, perversion and non-humanist existentialism*

However, where does this then leave us in terms of our overall argument? Where does this leave us with regards angst and our attempt to develop a non-humanist existentialism in Sartre's thought? The first thing to do, to answer this, is to re-iterate what function angst served in terms of the latter. For we said initially that the formulation we had developed regarding non-humanist existentialism remained excessively abstract. That is, we said that even after having broadened the meaning of man *as* perverse relation to world, by linking it to man's flight from his past, it was still insufficiently concrete. And as such we said that we would look at how this self-relation is actually manifest in consciousness to address this. In other words, to make our formulation of man's being more concrete we looked at how 'consciousness continually experiences itself as the nihilation of its past being.'¹²⁹ And continuing, we saw that for Sartre the experiential state in which this occurs, and where we have consciousness of our true being, is that of angst.

Consequently, we had now to enquire into this state. That is, to grasp the meaning of man *as* perverse relation more concretely, we asked what this state was and show how with it

¹²⁷ Caws, P. Caws, *Sartre* [London: Routledge, 1979], p71, devotes slightly more space to anguish, though this is still only a single paragraph. He associates angst with the realisation of the breakdown of the world's assumed order and stability. He also argues that Sartrean freedom 'is not so much freedom of action...as freedom of attitude.' [p70].

¹²⁸ In this respect Grene, M. Grene, *Sartre* [New York: New Viewpoints, 1973], is wrong when she asserts that the feeling in angst that 'I give meaning' is one of 'blind arrogance'. This is because this idea is rooted in the real nature of our situation here. [p136] Note also, like Desan and others, she dedicates only a few sentences to discussion of angst.

¹²⁹ BN, p28

we had an apprehension of our being as such a relation. Yet in turn we said we could do this through the concrete example of vertigo. And in this way we had to show how Sartre's description of this revealed such 'consciousness of nihilation',¹³⁰ such consciousness of our being *as* perverse modification of self and world. Were we successful in this though? In one sense 'yes'. For, we began by noting that 'the apprehension of myself as a destructible transcendent',¹³¹ on the precipice, my fear, led to an attempt to realise safe conduct. However we also saw how this effort then necessarily involved the negation of my counter-possibles of unsafe conduct, and hence my recognition of them as *really existing*. And further this apprehension of my counter-possibles as real for me led, we saw, to an awareness of myself as fundamentally constituted by possibility. In short, it led to an apprehension that 'I am indeed already there in the future',¹³² that I exist *as* possibility. And it was this we said which was the significant point. For if I there apprehended myself *as* possibility then I must apprehend myself as a perverse relation to self and world. This is because the being of possibility implies that which exists only through the world. That is, it implies that which comes about through, on the basis of, a transformation of what is given. And this transformation is perverse in so far as it necessarily implies, and constantly intimates, the very thing it is attempting to escape.

As a result then we can say that Sartre's example of the precipice serves its function. That is to say, it shows how through our intimacy with our counter-possibles and apprehension of ourselves *as* possibility, we get 'the apprehension of nothingness.'¹³³ In other words, the example shows how 'angst' is a real state corresponding to Sartre's ontological conception of man *as* perverse relation to self and world. And this in turn addresses our more general question about angst. For if this example can thus show how, what we have said is, the nature of our being is manifest in conscious experience then we have rendered that abstract formulation more concrete. In other words, we have not only shown that our conception of man *as* perverse can be verified by experience, but that the meaning of this can be enriched. This is because if we say that 'anguish appears as an apprehension of self...as it exists in the perpetual mode of detachment from what is',¹³⁴ then the meaning of this is expanded. For we have seen here that our perverse relation to being is not only a flight from our past, but a movement toward an unrealised future. That is, we have seen the concrete

¹³⁰ BN, p29

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² BN, p31

¹³³ See BN, p29

¹³⁴ BN, p35

meaning of our existing *as* a relation is in angst revealed *as* possibility. In short, it is revealed as both that which is the basis of our flight from self and that with which we affect the world. And it is also in this sense continuing, that the apprehension in angst is not to be confused with our initial pre-reflective intuition of self. For, whilst the latter existed simply as the awareness that we are only ever a relation to the world, the former discloses the *meaning* of this relation. That is, it discloses the relation *as* a perverse modification in which our possibilities give meaning to the radical contingency of self and world.¹³⁵

Yet with this have we then resolved the broader question with which we began this chapter? On one level the answer is ‘yes’. For if we began by trying to establish that Sartre’s phenomenological existentialism was, like Nietzsche’s existentialism, not humanist then we have in part succeeded. In other words, we have shown that Sartre has an alternative conception of man to the independent subject-entity of humanism. And what this was first emerged from the intuition of pre-reflective experience that we exist *as* a relation to the world. Consequently the remainder of our chapter has been spent trying to make sense of this notion. We first did this by looking at real negation as the basis of that relation, and concluded that we could render non-being, and hence man *as* relation intelligible by seeing him as a perverting modification of being. That is, we argued that ‘man’s relation to being is that he modifies it’; that he exists *as* the destabilising perversion of the world by non-being. Continuing though, we had to make this claim properly intelligible by connecting it to man’s actual existence. And we did this first by saying that man’s perversion of being is founded on a perverse flight from his own past, but also by suggesting there is a consciousness of this. That is, to render man *as* perverse relation properly intelligible we had to describe the manifestation of his ontological status in his concrete existence. And it is thus that by having shown how man has an apprehension of his true being in the state of angst that we have done this. In other words, with this we have shown how man *as* perverse relation to world concretely makes sense, and thus how a non-humanist *phenomenological* existentialism can be defended.

¹³⁵ The difference between the original ‘intuition’, derived from pre-reflective experience, and anguish is also that angst is an immediate reflective apprehension of something. That is, it is not a subsequent ‘recovery’ of an absorbed experience where true apprehension is impossible. Nonetheless, angst is also still ‘pre-philosophical’ in the sense that it is a revelation rather than an understanding. In other words it is something that cannot be, without the aid of philosophy, properly ‘captured’ or articulated.

Chapter four: *Sartre's non-humanist existentialism [ii] Perversity and self-evasion*

ABSTRACT: We said in our previous chapter that to demonstrate the main contention of our thesis we had to look at *phenomenological* existentialism. In other words, to demonstrate that existentialism in general, and not merely Nietzsche's thought, is non-humanist we had to show how Sartrean existentialism escapes humanism's subject-entity. And furthermore we did this by looking toward pre-reflective experience. For we saw there that prior to theoretical assumptions about what man is, we experience ourselves not as an independent or substantial self but only *as* a relation to the world. In short, we see that we are not the subject-entity of humanism. However, for this intuition to serve as the basis for a non-humanist *phenomenological* existentialism we had to show how it made sense theoretically. That is, we had to show how the idea of man *as* relation to the world can be rendered intelligible. And in turn we did this first by saying that this could be understood if man was the perverting modification of world that is non-being. This is because if man *is* the perversion of being then he can, *as* that transformation brought to the world, be *nothing but* the world, yet still possess a being distinct from it. We also said though that this formulation alone still remained insufficient. For if our non-humanist conception of man here is of man *as* perversion of world then this still remains on an extremely abstract level. And it was thus to render this idea more concrete and thus more intelligible that we next looked at the state of angst.

This was because if man *is* the perversion of world then awareness of this must be manifest in consciousness. And in angst by allowing a confrontation with our 'counter-possibles' we can say, such consciousness of our being is manifest. That is, in seeing these possibilities as just as real as our desired possibility, we apprehend our being *as* possibility. And it is this in turn which leads to awareness that it is my possibilities which bring meaning to the radical contingency of world, and hence of my being *as* the perversion of that world. However, as the current chapter addresses, this cannot represent a terminus for our enquiries. For despite representing conscious awareness of my being, and despite the fact that I must necessarily be aware of that being, angst is rarely ever in fact actually experienced. And thus we are led now to look at the 'evasion of angst'. In short, in order to make our non-humanist conception of man *as* relation fully intelligible we have thus to look at the methods by which man disguises to himself anguished awareness of his being. And these we will divide into two categories. On the one hand we look at how a primary 'absorption in the world' prevents authentic

recognition of the possibilities constitutive of angst. Secondly we will explore how a modification of this method allows us to evade angst even when it appears we are aware of our possibilities. Finally though, we must address the problem of how these methods of evasion, given they require awareness of the very thing to be evaded, can be successful. That is, we must address what is called ‘bad faith’; that relation to world which allows self-deception to be effective. And it is thus by doing this we hope to show how our intuition of man *as* relation, can be made fully intelligible. For if we can show both that the evasion of angst exists and how it is theoretically explicable we can explain the rarity of angst. And in doing this in turn we can remove one of the major obstacles to grasping man *as* relation, and hence to understanding a non-humanist *phenomenological* conception of his being.

A. Introduction:

[i] Angst and phenomenological existentialism

We began chapter three by arguing that the main contention of our thesis was still unproven. For, we said that even if Nietzsche’s existentialism had been shown to be non-humanist this did not necessarily imply anything about other modes of existential thought. And thus, we reasoned, if we wanted to demonstrate that existentialism as a whole avoided that label we had to do more. In other words, if we wanted to show that existentialism in general was not a humanism we had to look at another major strand of existential thought. That is, we had to look at *phenomenological* existentialism and show how it too went beyond the substantial subject of humanism. However we can now ask if we were successful in this enterprise. We can ask if we succeeded in showing that phenomenological existentialism, just like Nietzschean existentialism, was associated with a non-humanist conception of man. And in turn we can ask if we had therefore shown that existentialism in general was non-humanist. The answer is that in part we have. For we began by saying that we could escape humanism’s assumption of a subject-entity if we looked to the world of the pre-reflective. This is because what Gordon calls this ‘deeply submerged domain of awareness’¹, prior to reflective theorisation, gives us access to experience *as it is actually given*. That is, following Husserl

¹ J. Gordon, ‘Bad Faith: A Dilemma’ *Philosophy*, Vol. 60, No. 232 [1985]: 258-262, p258. Gordon nonetheless sets up a false dichotomy in suggesting that pre-reflective awareness must imply either a purely submerged and inaccessible consciousness or simply a ‘peripheral awareness’. Moreover, he is wrong to suggest that if the pre-reflective is not merely a peripheral awareness it must be wholly inaccessible to reflective consciousness.

and Heidegger's call 'To the things themselves!'², pre-reflective experience discloses 'man' prior to any ontological assumptions about what he must be. And this was significant because, as Gardner notes, 'we do not as a matter of phenomenological fact, encounter an 'I' in... *'unreflective consciousness.'*³ In other words, if recovered properly, we do not find in absorbed consciousness the subject-entity of humanism.

Instead all we find is a relation to the world. That is, we find that 'consciousness is defined by intentionality'⁴; that man exists solely *as* a relation to the intentional object, to the world. Yet we also said that this was only a starting point. For in order that this intuition serve as the basis for a non-humanist conception of man we had to make it theoretically intelligible. Put differently, we had to make sense of the idea that man exists *as* relation; that he could have no 'substance' separate from the world, yet still have a distinct being. And we achieved this first of all by viewing this relation in terms of 'non-being'. This was because, we said, man could *be* a relation to the world if he was the perverting modification of non-being brought to it. What this means is that if, as Sartre says, 'Man's *relation* with being is that he can modify it'⁵, then he could *be* the transformation brought to the surface of the world, yet not be distinct from it. In short, if his relation to the world were a modifying one, then he could be *nothing but* the world, yet still have a distinct being. And further this modification is perverse we said because it *subverts* being rather than simply providing a variation of it. For this modification that is non-being must be perverse because it necessarily contains in itself a constant reference to the thing it is trying to escape. That is, it must be perversely parasitical because otherwise the modification would evoke a new substance separate from world.

However, we also said this was still insufficient. This was because even if the idea of man *as* perverting modification of being rendered our initial intuition of man *as* relation more intelligible, it still remained extremely abstract. And it was therefore properly to render our non-humanist intuition of man intelligible that we had to suggest how this concretely related to man's existence. That is, we had to ask concretely what 'must man be in his being in order that through him nothingness may come to being?'⁶ And we did this first of all by suggesting that man must pervert, bring non-being to, a concrete being within his own being. In other words, in order that man be able perversely to modify being, he must be able to bring

² M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson [Oxford: Blackwell, 1962], p50

³ S. Gardner, *Sartre's Being and Nothingness* [New York: Continuum, 2009], p12. Instead the 'I' is a product of reflective consciousness, see *TE*, p16.

⁴ J-P. Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. by A. Brown [London: Routledge, 2004], p6

⁵ J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by H. Barnes [London: Routledge, 1958], p24

⁶ *BN*, p24

perverse non-being to the individual prior being of his own self. That is, as non-being can only emerge from the nihilation of a full concrete being, he must bring non-being to his own past self. And consequently with this we partially addressed our question. For if we said that we understand man *as* relation in terms of man *as* perversion then the more concrete meaning of this formulation is that man must exist as ‘a sort of escape from the self...’⁷ Put another way, the nihilation of the world *is* the nihilation of his own specific past. In short, the dissonance of the world which he *is*, is given through his own perverse flight from individual self.

Yet, it was also apparent in turn that this could not represent a terminus for our enquiries. For whilst the idea that, as Gardner puts it, man must ‘detach itself from *all* that it *is*’⁸ makes our initial formulation more concrete and intelligible, a major theoretical question still remained. And this is because we must necessarily be conscious of our being as described. In different words, if we are a perverting relation to world which is a flight from self, then, as Sartre says, we ‘must necessarily be conscious of this cleavage in being.’⁹ This is because since our being is the *activity* of perverting self and world, awareness of this must necessarily be manifest in consciousness. That is, if we must bring forth this perversion, it cannot passively exist ‘in’ us, like the operations of our liver. And, continuing, the conscious state which fills this role is that of ‘angst’. In brief, it is this state which allows us to resolve this theoretical problem and make our non-humanist conception of man more concrete and intelligible. For, to explain, angst is a conscious *existentiell* state wherein, as Heidegger has observed, we have an intimation of our own nothingness.¹⁰ This state can incorporate many different specific ontic forms and degrees of intensity,¹¹ but is nonetheless generally characterised by a profound awareness of, and intimacy with, one’s own possibilities. So for instance, Sartre gives a description of a man walking on a precipice who is confronted with the *real* possibility of suicide. There, he says, ‘suicide...becomes a *possibility* possible for *me*...’¹² And what this means is that suicide becomes not as before, merely an abstract

⁷ BN, p25

⁸ Gardner, p149

⁹ BN, p28

¹⁰ See BN, p29, see also BT, p228: SS40

¹¹ Anguish ‘before the past’ can occur when a resolution is tested by reality, e.g. when a man who has resolved not to gamble is suddenly confronted by the gambling table, and the tenuousness of his resolution, see BN, p32. Likewise Kierkegaard, appeals to *Frithiof’s Saga*, and the moment when Ingeborg looks across the sea to the point on the horizon over which Frithiof’s boat has disappeared as a case of angst. See G. Pattison, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* [Chesham: Acumen, 2005], p73-74: ‘As something sounded, an outburst of feeling on her part, a sigh, a word, would already have more of the attributes of time in itself, and is present more in the manner of something vanishing...’

¹² BN, p32

potentiality, something 'one' could hypothetically do but *mine*, something at that moment just as 'real' or possible as safe conduct.

Furthermore, it is in becoming genuinely aware of these 'counter-possibles' in this way that we are given an apprehension of our true being. This is because in encountering those possibilities as just as real as the desired possibility, we apprehend our being *as* possibility. That is, we are given an apprehension that '*I am the self which I will be, in the mode of not being it.*'¹³ For we apprehend, with the counter-possibles, that our possibilities are no longer 'outside' us, exercised intermittently as a 'capacity', but rather are constitutive of our being. And it is this point which is significant for our purposes. For awareness of self *as* possibility leads to awareness that it is my possibilities which bring meaning to the radical contingency of self and world. In short, it leads to awareness that '...the rise of man in the midst of the being which 'invests' him causes a world to be discovered.'¹⁴ This is because if I am aware of myself *as* possibility I must be aware of myself *as* a relation to world, since possibility is always bound to that which is a fixed given. And further possibility also implies this relation is one of a transformation founded on perverting non-being. For if the relation we bring to bear in our being is possibility then this implies that a relation of indeterminate transformation is brought to the world. In brief, it implies that we are the perverse modification of being that is non-being.

Consequently then with this account we were able to answer our previous question. For with angst we have a recognisable state in which man can be said to apprehend his being *as* a perverting relation to self and world. And more radical than Catalano's gloss that this means apprehension that 'the possibility of change always exists'¹⁵, we can say it means an apprehension of world as not yet settled. In short, it means angst is an apprehension of the world and my being as at that moment still fundamentally 'caught in the balance', 'at stake.' And it is this which represents my consciousness of my being *as* perverting modification of world. Continuing therefore it is also this which allows us to remove a major theoretical obstacle to the intelligibility of our non-humanist conception of man. For if with angst we have described how consciousness of our being as perverse relation is manifest, then there is no longer a question of our awareness of this being. That is, there is no longer a question of how our abstract description of man's being is concretely manifest in man's lived existence.

¹³ BN, p32

¹⁴ BN, p24

¹⁵ J. Catalano, 'Successfully lying to oneself: A Sartrean Perspective' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 50, No. 4 [1990]: 673-693, p678

And thus with this, we can say, we have been able to render our original non-humanist intuition of man *as* relation both more concrete and more intelligible.

[ii] Outline of the problem: rarity of angst

However does all this then mean we have successfully answered our original question? That is, with angst as consciousness of our being *as* perverse relation, have we fully shown that a non-humanist *phenomenological* existentialism can be defended? The answer is that we have only partially done so. For, whilst our earlier account of angst allowed us to solve one major problem concerning a non-humanist conception of man it did so at the price of opening up another. And what this is can be understood if we consider again why a description of angst was required in the first place. This is because, as we said, if we *are* the activity of perverting self and world then we must necessarily have a consciousness of this. That is, if our being is a bringing forth of a specific perversion then we cannot do this without active awareness. But it is also clear that this cannot be only an ‘occasional’ awareness. For, as Sartre says, ‘the original necessity of being its own nothingness does not belong to consciousness intermittently and on the occasion of particular negations.’¹⁶ In short, Webber is wrong to suggest that ‘For consciousness to be translucent...is for there to be *some* awareness of one’s own consciousness.’¹⁷ Rather the translucency of consciousness implies that we must be *constantly* aware of our being. And it is obvious now what problem this presents for our account of angst.

For, to explain, if anguish represents awareness of my being as perverse relation to world and self then why aren’t we in anguish permanently? In other words, if anguish is consciousness of our being, and we must necessarily always have this consciousness, then why isn’t angst ‘a permanent state of my affectivity’?¹⁸ In brief, as Sartre asks ‘How can we explain the rarity of the phenomenon of anguish?’¹⁹ Consequently we can say, it is this question which represents the next step in our argument. For if we wish to render our non-humanist conception of man fully intelligibly and concrete we must explain why this is the case. That is, to properly make sense of man *as* perverting modification of self and world we must explain why the conscious manifestation of this is so rare. For unless we can show why

¹⁶ BN, p28

¹⁷ J. Webber, ‘Motivated aversion: non-thetic awareness in bad faith’ *Sartre Studies International*, Vol. 8, No. 1 [2002], p8, emphasis added.

¹⁸ BN, p35

¹⁹ Ibid

anguish is so rarely experienced in concrete existence this conception of man will remain obscure. And it is this for this reason that we must now look at the evasion of angst. In different words, we must explore the ‘processes by which we try to hide anguish from ourselves.’²⁰ This is because it is only in doing this, and showing how being-in-the-world allows for such evasion, that we will make fully plausible our non-humanist conception of man. In short, it is only in showing *that* such methods do in fact exist, and how they can be successful, that the plausibility of a non-humanist *phenomenological* existentialism can be defended.

B. Flight from anguish:

[i] Flight from awareness of possibilities: [a] ‘absorption in the world’

So, continuing, what are these ‘processes’ through which man attempts to disguise his conscious experience of anguish? Unfortunately we can begin by noting that the secondary literature, for the most part, is of little assistance on this issue. That is, because of the ‘humanist’ nature of many interpretations they have largely ignored the ontological significance of angst. And Hartmann is symptomatic of this problem when he discusses the first chapter of *Being and Nothingness*. For he says that ‘Sartre goes on to discuss freedom...including its reflective mode of awareness, anguish’, then adds that ‘For our purposes we can ignore this side issue.’²¹ In other words, the question of how man evades his being, manifest in angst, has not been taken seriously because the significance of ‘angst’ has been overlooked. In short, because man has been viewed in humanistic terms the import of angst as a reflection of a non-humanist mode of being is ignored. And this means that the question of how everyday consciousness involves an evasion of this is ignored likewise. Rather for these interpretations any self-deception and evasion of angst is simply run into Sartre’s discussion of bad faith. And Morris confirms this, saying that ‘lies to oneself or self-deception are, roughly speaking, what Sartre calls ‘bad faith.’²²

Moreover, in so far as ‘evasion of angst’ gets mentioned at all, it is viewed, as we see with Morris, Catalano, Salvan, and McCulloch, in terms of an essentially ‘ontic’ phenomenon. That is to say, what we see in all these discussions is an idea that we evade

²⁰ BN, p43

²¹ K. Hartmann, *Sartre’s Ontology* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966], p52

²² K. Morris, *Sartre* [Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008], p76

angst through a variety of contingent psychological ‘strategies’.²³ So for instance, we might evade awareness of our possibilities by adopting a belief in determinism, or by adopting specific patterns of bad faith. In contrast though we will argue that evasion of angst is not a particular psychological ruse we might employ from time to time. Instead, we will suggest, it is bound up with our very being in the world. And this is linked to Sartre’s claim that, ‘the most common situations of our life...do not manifest themselves to us through anguish because their very structure excludes anguished apprehension.’²⁴ In other words, there is something about the structure of the ‘common situations of our lives’, which necessitates evasion of angst. For there is something about the predominant structure of our relation to the world which necessitates that consciousness delude itself about its actual nature. And it is with this point then that we will begin.

But what, to address our question, is it about man’s being-in-the-world that ‘excludes anguished apprehension’, excludes ‘the recognition of a possibility as *my* possibility’²⁵? We begin by noting that human beings for the most part, do in fact *believe* they are constantly aware of their possibilities. That is to say, when reflecting on our everyday existence, we tell ourselves that we meaningfully ‘choose’ between various possibilities, and that we are ‘free’. And it is this pre-critical interpretation of ‘everyday’ existence which will then serve as our point of contrast with Sartre’s view. For, on closer phenomenological inspection, man’s actual existence in the world is more problematic. This is because, as McCulloch has observed, ‘much of the time we are absorbed in activity...we often do not realise what our possibilities are until we find ourselves acting them out.’²⁶ In other words, we are not much of the time free agents rationally aware of possibilities before us, but beings absorbed in certain kinds of activity. So for instance, when getting dressed, or writing a document, we are

²³ Note, following on from this, that the Sartre literature on this point can be divided into four categories:
[a] Those, like Hartmann, and the contributions in the Cambridge companion, *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, edited by C. Howells [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992] which ignore the issue altogether.
[b] Those, like Morris and Grene, M. Grene, *Sartre* [New York: New Viewpoints, 1973], who conflate the evasion of angst with Sartre’s discussion of bad faith, or assume that bad faith is the central ‘means’ of evading angst.

[c] Those, like Caws, P. Caws, *Sartre* [London: Routledge, 1979], Catalano, J. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre’s ‘Being and Nothingness’* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974], and Desan, W. Desan, *The Tragic Finale* [New York: Harper and Row, 1960] which dedicate only a couple of paragraphs to the issue.

And [d], finally, those like Salvan, J. Salvan, *To Be and Not To Be* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962], and McCulloch, G. McCulloch, *Using Sartre* [London: Routledge, 1994], who spend a little more time with the issue, but still provide only an ontic ‘list’ of means of evasion without coherently linking these to man’s being-in-the-world. Moreover, each of these individual ‘means’ of evasion usually receives no more than a few sentences attention.

²⁴ *BN*, p35

²⁵ *BN*, p35

²⁶ McCulloch, p47

not continually ‘making a choice’ to carry on these activities. Instead we are simply ‘caught up’ in doing them.²⁷

However, this is not all. For Sartre’s point in relation to this idea of ‘absorption’ is not merely that much human activity is conducted on a pre-reflective level which excludes awareness of possibilities *at that moment*. Rather, there is also something about the nature of absorbing activity, as a mode of our being-in-the-world, which goes beyond this. That is, there is something about the nature of activity which means that we are ‘caught up’ in a world beyond the specific immediacy of the act. And it is this which Sartre goes on to discuss in relation to writing a book. As he says then,

In the act of tracing the letters which I am writing, the whole sentence, still unachieved, is revealed as a passive exigency to be written. It is the very meaning of the letters which I form, and its appeal is not put into question, precisely because I cannot write the words without transcending them toward the sentence and because I discover it as the necessary condition for the meaning of the words which I am writing. [BN, p36]

In different words then, we can only meaningfully write, or perform any action, because we are aware of doing it ‘for the sake of’ something else beyond the immediacy of the act. In this way writing only makes sense precisely because there is a transcendent, the sentence, toward which the act is directed, and which the action implies. Yet it is precisely this point which sets in train a deeper ‘absorption’ in the world wherein we do not seem to have any awareness of our possibilities. For, if a specific ‘act’ implies a form beyond itself it can seem like the rest of the ‘action’ in the broader sense ‘is revealed as a passive exigency.’²⁸ That is, that by writing and being absorbed in writing, we are already ‘pulled’ towards the ‘demand’ of the completed sentence which seems to possess a pseudo-objective character. In short, as Sartre says, ‘...the action which discovers itself to me through my act tends to crystallize as a transcendent, relatively independent form.’²⁹ And it is this pseudo-objective demand of the completed action which then distorts the fact that we alone are

²⁷ Gardner, p152, very briefly touches upon ‘world absorption’ as a means of evading angst. That is, he briefly mentions how ‘In the most common situations of life our consciousness is ‘in action’, meaning that we apprehend our possibilities only in so far as we are actively *realising them*.’ Yet he does not develop this point. Rather, like other accounts of angst-evasion, such as Webber’s, J. Webber, *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre* [New York: Routledge, 2009], p74, his principal focus is on our belief in psychological determinism.

²⁸ BN, p36

²⁹ Ibid

responsible for pursuing that activity. For this pseudo-objective demand seems to ‘exist’ in the world relatively independent of us.

***[ii]Flight from awareness of possibilities: [b] the instrumental complex and ‘thrownness’
in the world***

Yet, of course, one might here raise an objection. To explain, one might say that even if our specific acts seem to create the force of a demand existing semi-independently of us, allowing us to evade our possibilities, then such evasion can still only be a limited one. In other words, even if we are to some extent ‘absorbed’ in entire activities, and not just limited ‘acts’, then surely activities, like writing a sentence, or cooking a meal, end? And surely, by the same token, are we not nonetheless the originators of whichever ‘activities’ are pursued in the first place? The Sartrean answer to this question, though, here is two-fold. And the first point to make would be to say that no ‘activity’ exists in isolation. As Sartre says, ‘the sentence which I write is the meaning of the letters which I trace, but the whole work which I wish to produce is the meaning of the sentence.’³⁰ In different words, the transcendence which exists in the relation between the specific act and a broader ‘activity’ also exists between the activity and a broader set of activities and purposes. So, for instance, the letters I write make sense only because they refer to a sentence beyond that specific act. However, at the same time, the sentence itself only makes sense because it refers to the book to be written beyond that. And likewise, in turn, we can say the writing of a book only is *itself* meaningful in relation to a broader ‘life’ of which writing a book is one aspect.

In this way then, to address the initial concern, we never really ‘stop’ or step outside the world of demands. If one activity has the appearance of an end, as when I stop writing for the day, my day’s writing has already created a series of pseudo-objective ‘exigencies’ for the evening and the day after. And this point can be made clearer if we consider what Sartre calls ‘relations of instrumentality’³¹ or, in Heidegger’s terms, the instrumental complex.³² For as Sartre says,

At the same time in the very framework of the act an indicative complex of instruments reveals itself and organizes itself [pen-ink-paper-lines-margin,

³⁰ *BN*, p36

³¹ *Ibid*

³² See *BT*, SS15-16

etc.], a complex which can not be apprehended for itself but which rises in the heart of the transcendence which discloses to me as a passive exigency the sentence to be written. Thus in the quasi-generality of everyday acts, I am engaged, I have ventured, and I discover my possibilities by realizing them and in the very act of realizing them as exigencies, urgencies, instrumentalities. [BN, p36]

What this means then is that my actions 'bring to life' a 'complex' which transcends me as an individual, and over which we have no control. The 'transcendent' which is given a pseudo-objective reality by my specific act, say of tracing letters, also causes to arise at the same time an entire 'complex of instruments' standing in relation to that transcendent. In this way an entire 'world' is brought to be my successive engagement in activity. And what is critical here for our argument is that such a world transcends me as an individual. For the relations of instrumentality that are disclosed by my acts are just as much free of my volition as the transcendent 'task' which the specific act, say of hammering, implies. In different words, the other tools needed, the transport to move the finished table, are just as much revealed by my hammering as constituting pseudo-independent exigencies, as is the task of 'making a table'. And, as a consequence of this we find ourselves absorbed in a world populated by a series of pseudo-objective demands. In other words, the nature of the instrumental complex means that I experience the possibilities I am realizing as somehow bound up with, and emanating from, the world. This means therefore that I experience them as not really being 'mine'.

Moreover, what we're talking about here is not simply 'instrumentalism'. The point is not merely that if we wish to do 'x' then we must do 'y'. For, rather, the nature of our absorption is such that not only are we discussing a relation that precedes reflective instrumental reason, but that the 'end' itself within this complex is *itself* obscured. As Sartre says, 'So long as I remain on the plane of action, the book to be written is only the distant and presupposed meaning of the act which reveals my possibilities to me. The book is only the implication of the action; it is not made an object and posited for itself... It is only the permanent, remote meaning in terms of which I can understand what I am writing in the present...' ³³ In other words, the book within the world of activity and the instrumental

³³ BN, p37

complex is never really ‘posited’ and brought fully to consciousness. Instead, it appears as a hazy transcendent ‘horizon’ around which our world organises itself. And this means that being caught up in the world also obscures whatever ‘end’ is being pursued. For, absorbed in a world of pseudo-objective demands presenting continual ‘things to be done’, the overall purpose gets lost. The end, that is, paradoxically, is obscured by the very activity and instrumental network that necessarily has to take that purpose for granted.

However, does all this then answer the objections raised earlier? Does this answer the objection to the idea of absorption as a means of evading angst, that we are only ever temporarily engaged in activity? Well, the answer in a sense is ‘yes’. For, in so far as we have argued that the nature of absorption, as based around a transcendent aspect of action, extends beyond any *particular* activity, then we avoid the objection stated. That is to say, by arguing that an entire transcendent ‘world’ of activities and demands is created by our immersion in specific acts then it is possible to see how we might be ‘absorbed’ in a much more ubiquitous sense. And in this way then we can see how we might be able consistently to evade a true awareness of possibilities as ‘ours’; as possibility being what we alone can bring into being. Yet, have we nonetheless managed to answer a further question which was raised earlier? In other words, have we addressed the question of whether even if we were caught up in the slip-stream of a ‘world’, which within its confines appears to be real and unquestionable, we would still be the ones who had entered into it? We are here talking about what Sartre calls the ‘original projection of myself which stands as my choice of myself in the world.’³⁴ And the question is, if it is this choice ‘...which causes the existence of values, appeals, expectations, and in general a world...’³⁵, then wouldn’t we be, at least at some point, aware of having made it? In short, wouldn’t we still have initially chosen *that*? And would not this still be the case even if our absorption in ‘our’ world meant that the original choice ceased to be questioned?

In a sense Sartre’s answer here is ‘no’. And this is because, he argues, of another aspect of our being-in-the-world which we can call ‘thrownness’. For, as he explains, in our being-in-the-world, ‘...we do not first appear to ourselves, to be thrown subsequently into enterprises.’³⁶ In other words, there never really appears a moment ‘before’ we are engaged in the world of activity, an original position where we choose ourselves. Rather, as Sartre says, ‘Our being is immediately “in situation”; that is, it arises in enterprises and knows itself

³⁴ BN, p39

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

first in so far as it is reflected in those enterprises.’³⁷ In different words then, we just find ourselves in a world where we are already acting and compelled to act. We already find ourselves, that is, absorbed in a network of values, activities and expectations prior to any original ‘choice’ about our fundamental projects.

Consequently, to address the previous question, we do not to begin with choose which ‘world’ to be caught up in. Rather, as Sartre says, ‘We discover ourselves...in a world peopled with demands, in the heart of projects “in the course of realization.”’³⁸. And this means that we already just find ourselves caught in the slip-stream of a ‘world’. In other words, if we already just find ourselves in the midst of activity, then the suggestion that we may at least have ‘chosen’ the set of demands in which we are enmeshed carries no weight. For if we already find ourselves engaged in activity then there can be no original choice which precedes our absorption. That is, if we already find ourselves amidst activity which creates for us pseudo-objective demands and a world of ‘things to be done’, then we do not originally ‘choose’. On the contrary, exploration of this question merely reveals that our absorption in the world, and the evasion of possibilities there, is even more all encompassing than expected. For this point about our ‘thrownness’ merely completes the picture of ourselves as ‘lost’ in the world. That is, it completes a picture of man as finding himself already acting and compelled to act according to a purpose that transcends his choice and comprehension. And as such we are here completing the picture of a world where we feel that what we call our ‘choice’ there is somehow lacking. This is because with this point we confirm the vague yet inescapable apprehension that this life I appear to have chosen is not really ‘mine.’ That is, we confirm the sense that whilst I appear to have ‘chosen’ the course of my life, that nonetheless my world and my possibilities do not really belong to me. In short, we confirm the sense that ‘my’ possibilities have always existed in the mode of an abstract and impersonal generality.

³⁷ *BN*, p39

³⁸ *Ibid*

[iii]Flight from awareness of possibilities: [c] evasion of angst on the 'reflective' level

Nevertheless, our absorption in the world, and our evasion of our possibilities as a result, cannot be absolute. If this were the case the *existentiell* state of angst we described earlier could never be experienced, and indeed man would be permanently debarred from comprehending himself. As such, then, it must be possible, as Sartre says, that 'I disengage myself from the world where I had been engaged...' ³⁹ That is to say, there must be situations in which we can genuinely 'step back' from our absorption in the world, and comprehend its pseudo-objective appeals as really coming from us. In short, there must be the possibility of calling our particular world and its instrumental complex 'into question', and of recovering from its apparent fixidity a sense of it as being still 'at stake'. Yet, frustratingly, Sartre is vague about how exactly such situations come about. He says that, in order truly to call that existent world into question 'I must place myself on the plane of reflection' ⁴⁰, and contrasts this with the 'plane of action.' ⁴¹ However, based on what we have said already, he cannot mean simply 'reflection' in the more general sense of the term. For, as already alluded to, general everyday 'reflection', by which is meant, say, 'reflecting' on which train to catch, or what course to take, is simply part of an extended conception of world absorption and activity.

Rather, 'the plane of reflection' to which Sartre alludes must resemble something more akin to the 'pure reflection' he discusses in *Transcendence of the Ego*. ⁴² That is, what he calls 'the reflective apprehension of freedom by itself' ⁴³, must be a more rarefied phenomenon than everyday reflection. And how we might be put onto such a rarefied plane of reflection, therefore, may be linked to what we can think of as exceptional situations or acts. So, as Sartre says, '...at each instant we are thrust into the world and engaged there. This means that we act before positing our possibilities and that these possibilities which are disclosed as realized or in process of being realized refer to meanings which necessitate special acts in order to be put into question.' ⁴⁴ Now, what exactly constitutes these 'special acts' or how they come about, for Sartre is in turn not made explicit. Nevertheless, looking back to his original discussion of angst, and particularly the examples of anguish he uses, we can make a suggestion. In other words, based on Sartre's prior discussion, we can suggest

³⁹ BN, p39

⁴⁰ BN, p37

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² See TE, p12-13

⁴³ BN, p39

⁴⁴ BN, p37

that there are certain exceptional situations where ‘special acts’ become possible and where the possibility of disengaging from our absorption in the world arises. And these special situations are those where, as in Sartre’s example of the man on the precipice, we can say, the ordinary organisation of our world is temporarily disrupted.

Put another way then, there are certain situations where the absorbing and unquestionably ‘real’ character of our world is suspended and confrontation with our genuine possibilities becomes unavoidable. So for instance, to take Sartre’s examples: ‘The man who has just received a hard blow- for example, losing a great part of his wealth in a crash-’⁴⁵, or a man who finds himself on a narrow path before a precipice. Both, we can say, experience a destabilisation of their ordinary, familiar, worlds. In the former case, we literally say that ‘his world has come crashing down’, and he is now separated from the ordinary flow of life: mortgage, family, job etc. Likewise, in the latter case, our ordinary sense of ‘getting on with’ life, the sense of its ‘reality’, its implicit value and its obligations, is abruptly challenged by the sudden and unavoidable confrontation with the possibility of death. What we see then in both cases is the possibility of a disengagement from our ordinary world-absorption and concomitantly a direct confrontation with a possibility as ‘my possibility’⁴⁶. That is, we see with this disengagement a genuine sense of my being and the world as now open, ‘at stake’. And with this we apprehend my being *as* the perverting modification which brings meaning to that world.

Yet returning to our central question, how does all this relate then to the evasion of angst, and thus to the intelligibility of our non-humanist conception of man? Well, it does so in so far as these ‘exceptional situations’ where I am confronted with a fundamental sense of possibility, do not, for all we have said, typically lead to authentic anguish. In other words, as Sartre makes clear, ‘We should not conclude that being brought on to the reflective plane and envisaging one’s distant or immediate possibilities suffice to apprehend oneself in *pure* anguish.’⁴⁷ In short, experiencing situations where we are disengaged from the world does not suffice for true anguished recognition of my being. For, despite these being a facet of human life, albeit one that is ‘rare’ relative to the ordinary flow of our lives, we do not in most cases experience authentic angst there. In brief, despite these situations which disrupt world-absorption compelling us to confront a real possibility, we nonetheless mostly remain unawares there of our being *as* possibility. That is, we mostly still remain unawares of our

⁴⁵ BN, p29

⁴⁶ BN, p35

⁴⁷ BN, p40

being *as* that non-being which is a perverting modification of world. And, as such, this implies that there must be another form of structural self-evasion other than world-absorption that allows us to evade consciousness of our true being.

What though is this other form of evasion? What is this evasion protecting us from angst even in those situations when our ordinary world is disrupted and recognition of our fundamental possibilities seems unavoidable? To answer this question it is necessary to look more closely at those situations where this occurs, and in particular at Sartre's example of the man on the precipice. For there, as we saw in our previous chapter, the man was confronted by what Sartre refers to as 'counter-possibles'. In other words, we saw that in order that he be able to pursue the possibility of safe conduct there he had at the same time to bring to awareness the contradictory possibility of suicide. And this is what Sartre refers to when he says, in relation to these counter-possibles, that 'In truth I can not avoid positing their existence by the same movement which generates the chosen possibility as mine. I cannot help constituting them as *living* possibilities that is, *as having the possibility of becoming my possibilities*.'⁴⁸ In different words then, in such situations we are obliged to bring to awareness the contradictory possibilities. That is, as a condition of envisaging a particular 'positive' possibility we must become aware of those counter-possibles which then become just as real as the former. And this awareness is precisely what, as discussed earlier, is constitutive of authentic angst. For, in being aware of the counter-possibles as just as possible for me as safe conduct I become aware of the radical indeterminacy of my being. That is, in this way, I become aware of my being as 'at stake'; as constituted by perverting non-being.

Consequently, when placed in these situations where recognition of our possibilities seems unavoidable, the strategy of evasion focuses on the nature of these 'counter-possibles.' For if they could be avoided somehow then the anguished apprehension of my non-being could be likewise forestalled. Yet as discussed, the nature of the situation, unlike that of 'the most common "absorbed" situations of our life'⁴⁹, does not permit us simply to ignore them altogether. This is because the nature of the situation here is such that an awareness of these counter-possibles as existing, as 'there', is unavoidable. And as such, the strategy of evasion here must operate by attempting not to *deny* their being, but to transform the way I perceive it. So how does it do this? Well, it does so to begin with, by imputing to the counter-possibles which are mine a certain kind of objectivity. That is, as Sartre says, 'I force myself to see

⁴⁸ BN, p41

⁴⁹ BN, p35

them as endowed with a transcendent, purely logical being, in short, as things.’⁵⁰ But how does this work, and how does this neutralise the angst inducing nature of the counter-possible?

Taking the former question first, Sartre’s argument is that we constitute our counter-possibles as ‘objective’ by conceiving them in relation to a hypothetical and abstract ‘otherness.’⁵¹ What this means is that we attempt to see them in a given situation as ‘...fundamentally conceivable by another or as *possibles of another who might find himself in the same situation.*’⁵² However, we do not do this, to be clear, by conceiving of an actually existing other who has the counter-possible as a real concrete possibility. Rather, the ‘otherness’ which constitutes the objectivity of the situation is that of abstract human possibility *in general*. That is, the otherness utilised here is that of a general human potentiality, of what any human, based on his objective physical capabilities ‘could do in that situation.’ So, for instance, in the case of the man on the precipice the counter-possible of suicide is construed not as a real despairing possibility for a concrete other. Instead it is conceived as something that is logically conceivable given the depth of the ravine and a man’s capacity to jump. And it is *this* empty ‘otherness’ through which we perceive our counter-possibles as ‘objective.’

As a consequence, we can see how we create the illusion that our counter-possibles, as Sartre puts it, ‘...belong to the objective situation as a transcendent structure...’⁵³ For in conceiving of them via this generic human relation to the situation, they become simply ‘there’. That is, by conceiving of them in this way they appear to inhere objectively in the world as possibilities just as much as the unevenness of the path or the hardness of the rock. And at the same time thus it is clear why such a process then allows us to neutralise the angst inducing character of our counter-possibles. For in turn, if we can render our counter-possibles as ‘objective’ in this way, as Sartre says, they would exist as ‘...an external possibility in relation to me, like movement in relation to the motionless billiard ball.’⁵⁴ In other words, the counter possible, seeming to inhere independently in the world, would be put at a distance from my being. Thus in this way the counter-possible of suicide would not be

⁵⁰ BN, p41

⁵¹ See Caws: ‘The chief strategy of this refusal [our refusal of our own freedom] is our tendency to look at ourselves as though we were other people, and to view our freedom as though it were the freedom of another.’ [Caws, p71] And Angst ordinarily ‘is concealed from us by our engagement in a social world in which values are prescribed.’ [Ibid] Note however Caws’ views the role of the ‘other’ here in essentially ontic terms, linking it to ‘social pressure’ and ‘conformity’, rather than the structures of being-in-the-world.

⁵² BN, p41

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

felt as a *real* possibility for me determining my being. In short it would not be felt as something genuinely still to be decided, or as actually concerning me, but as merely a feature of the precipice I might happen to notice.⁵⁵ And thus, in this way, externalising my relation to the counter-possible, I would evade the anguished awareness of myself as genuinely being constituted by this possibility. In brief, I would avoid awareness of my being *as* possibility, and hence of my being *as* the rise of meaning in the world.

Rather, we can say, I would be able to continue with a sense of myself, and my chosen possibility, as ‘solid’ and ‘given.’ As Sartre says, ‘the chosen possibility would appear - due to its selection - as my only concrete possible, and consequently the nothingness which separates me from it and which actually confers on it its possibility would collapse.’⁵⁶ In other words my ‘possibility’, here of safe conduct, would cease to be troubled. That is to say, I will carry on along my given, expected path; I will not doubt *seriously* that I will continue sensibly to safety. Yet the force of this ‘strategy’ of evasion also lies in the fact that it does not thereby destroy altogether the sense of a certain kind of freedom at the same time. As Sartre explains, in relation to the counter-possible, ‘They would preserve just enough being to preserve for my possible its character as gratuitous, as a free possibility for a free being, but they would be disarmed of their threatening character.’⁵⁷ In different words, in placing our counter-possibles outside us in the world, but in still noting their existence, I can maintain a sense that hypothetically I ‘could have’ chosen suicide. That is, I can still ‘entertain’ the counter-possible as a ‘possibility’ that it was within my power to pursue. But it is an empty and abstract ‘entertaining’. For, I do not take seriously the idea of jumping from the cliff or ceasing to write the book. And it is for this reason then that we are able to imagine that we meaningfully chose our ‘concrete possible’, yet evade angst. In short, we can for this reason believe we are ‘free’ in those situations, whilst also evading any sense that the ordinary course of our lives is there ‘called into question’ or put ‘at stake’.

⁵⁵See also McCulloch’s distinction between ‘mere logical possibilities’ and ‘live ones’, p48. However McCulloch does not elaborate on the nature or origins of this distinction.

⁵⁶ BN, p42

⁵⁷ BN, p41-42

[iv] Conclusions regarding the evasion of angst

Consequently then, we can now see how the questions with which we began this section have been answered. To explain, we started by saying there are certain situations within life where ‘world absorption’, which obscures our awareness of possibility and hence our true being, is disrupted. In these situations, we said, the ordinary flow of life is suspended and we are confronted with a sense of our being as at stake again, of a genuine and unavoidable sense of possibility. Yet we then asked how it was that despite the occurrence of such situations intermittently within our lives, that we do not typically experience angst there. That is, we asked how it was that despite the occurrence of these situations we have little awareness of our being *as* perverse relation revealed in that state. We have now, we can say, furnished an answer. For as we have seen, we evade angst in these situations where we cannot avoid recognition of our possibilities, by transforming the way we perceive what Sartre calls ‘counter-possibles’. That is, we evade angst there by transforming our perception of those possibilities counter to our own, like suicide, which arise with and become just as real as our ‘positive’ possibility.

Furthermore, as described, we do this on the basis of what we might call a certain kind of ‘exorcism’. In other words, we evade angst by ‘exorcising’ the haunting non-being of the counter-possible and rendering it as something objective, and thus something safely inhering in the world. That is to say, we take the ambivalent threat of the counter-possible and its uncanny reference to ourselves, and turn it into something banal, ‘everyday’, fixed and given. And this is done, moreover, by conceiving of our contradictory possibilities in terms of what Sartre calls ‘...the possibles of an undifferentiated Other.’⁵⁸ In different words, we render the counter-possible objective and ‘safe’, by conceiving of it in terms of a generic human potential in relation to the situation. We conceive of it as something ‘one’ could do, but not as essentially concerning me. Thus in this way we can both maintain an awareness of these counter-possibles in ‘exceptional’ situations, and yet not be challenged by them with regards to our being. As Sartre says, explaining, ‘We should like to preserve from the original intuition what it reveals to us as our independence and our responsibility but we tone down all the original nihilisation in it...’⁵⁹ That is, in this manner we exorcise the truly threatening character of the counter-possibles and of our freedom. We still believe the counter-possible existed ‘there’, that we could have chosen it, but such comprehension is now part of the

⁵⁸ BN, p43

⁵⁹ Ibid

furniture of the everyday, it is not something that threatens us. And thus, returning to our question, we can see how even where ordinary absorption in the world is threatened, we can evade the angst that might stem from that disruption. For if, when we are temporally detached from our world, we can both maintain that we are ‘free’ *and* yet take our concrete possibility as effectively ‘given’, then such detachment need not worry us. In short, if we can still avoid the threat to our possibility even when recognition of our counter-possible is unavoidable, then no exceptional situation need concern us.

But then where does this leave our argument as a whole? Where does awareness of this second form of evasion leave the intelligibility of our non-humanist conception of man? Well, if we look back to the very beginning of our argument we can see. For we began by arguing that we could comprehend our pre-reflective, non-humanist, intuition of man by seeing it in terms of perverse modification. That is, we said that our intuition of man *as* relation could be rendered intelligible by viewing man *as* the perversion of world that is non-being. Yet we also said in turn, that for this account of his being properly to make sense it had to be manifest in man’s concrete awareness. And thus we were led to describe angst as a conscious state where, through intimacy with our possibilities, we apprehend our being *as* the perverting modification of world and self. However, our present chapter began by observing that there was a serious problem with angst in this role. For if our being as perverting activity entails that we are always necessarily aware of our being, and angst is this awareness, then ‘anguish ought to be a permanent state of my affectivity.’⁶⁰ Yet it is in fact in concrete life ‘completely exceptional.’⁶¹ And it is for this reason that if we wished to maintain the plausibility of angst and hence of our non-humanist conception of man we had to resolve this problem. That is, to ensure that our conception of man *as* relation was fully intelligible we had to show how we are able to evade anguished awareness of our being.

As such, continuing, we did this first by suggesting that the evasion of angst was not the result of contingent psychological strategies such as belief in determinism. And nor was it the result of the fact that, as Webber puts it, ‘people find their freedom disconcerting.’⁶² Instead we said it was a necessary product of our being-in-the-world. And in this way we first of all identified a mode of evasion that occurs within ‘the most common situations of our

⁶⁰ *BN*, p35

⁶¹ *Ibid*

⁶² J. Webber, ‘Bad Faith and Other’, in *Reading Sartre: On phenomenology and existentialism*, ed. J. Webber [London: Routledge, 2011], p185. See also Morris, p81-82, for suggestion that we evade angst because we find it psychologically ‘disconcerting’ or unpleasant, rather than because of the fundamental structure of the world.

life.’⁶³ This we said could be understood as ‘world absorption’. For these ‘common situations’ are defined to begin with by absorption in activity. Such activity obscures our sense of possibility because it creates by our acts, the meaning of which is contained outside themselves, pseudo-objective demands in the world, ‘things to be completed’. And further, we argued that because each particular activity is bound by ‘relations of instrumentality’⁶⁴, our engagement in a particular act implied being bound up with an instrumental complex. That is, engagement in a particular activity we said implies engagement in a ‘world’ of pseudo-objective exigencies. Thus we continued, we were in this way ‘absorbed’ in the slip-stream of a world. And this situation is summed up well by what Sartre calls the ‘serious mood’, which we for the most part inhabit. As he says, ‘In the serious mood I define myself in terms of the object by pushing aside *a priori* as impossible all enterprises in which I am not engaged at the moment...’ And this means, as he says, that ‘...the meaning which my freedom has given to the world, I apprehend as coming from the world and constituting my obligations.’⁶⁵ In other words, in the ‘serious mood’ I feel that there are ‘just things to be done’; I am absorbed in a world that sets before me tasks to be completed and I do not seriously question this. And finally, we said, this is not a ‘world’ which we originally choose. For we do not prior to activity choose the fundamental values or ends which create that world. Rather, we are just ‘fallen’ in it; we always already find ourselves acting and compelled to act there.

C. Bad Faith: the possibility of evasion

[i] The problem of self-evasion

As a consequence then, in combination with the method by which we ‘exorcise’ our counter-possibles by conceiving of them as ‘objective’ aspects of the world, we have accounted for ‘the totality of processes by which we try to hide anguish from ourselves.’⁶⁶ In other words, we have described how we evade anguish both in the ‘common’ situations of our lives and in those more exceptional situations where ordinary absorption in the world is suspended. However, we can ask, have we thereby with this answered our question concerning the intelligibility of angst, and hence of our non-humanist conception of man? Have we

⁶³ BN, p35

⁶⁴ BN, p36

⁶⁵ BN, p39-40

⁶⁶ BN, p43

addressed sufficiently, that is, the question of how we are able systematically to evade anguished awareness of our true being? In one sense, we can say, we have. For we have demonstrated with our account of these two modes of evasion that angst-evasion has a basis in phenomenological reality. In short, we have shown with this that the ‘rarity of the phenomenon of anguish’⁶⁷ is not simply inexplicable. And continuing, we have done so with reference to the very structures of our being-in-the-world.

Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to suggest that we have thus fully answered the question concerning the intelligibility of angst as concrete awareness of our being *as* perverse relation. For whilst we have shown that the evasion of angst is a phenomena that exists, we have not yet shown how such a phenomenon is itself theoretically explicable. In different words, we have still yet to show how it is that these evasions which circumscribe our existence can be effective. And this is a problem that becomes especially clear if we consider the second means of evading angst by ‘objectifying’ the possibilities which constitute my being. That is, it becomes clear if we look again at the mode of evasion whereby our possibilities are rendered as banal aspects of the world. For, there this method of ‘exorcising’ the threat of what these possibilities imply about my being can take place only because their threatening character is acknowledged in the first place. As Sartre says, explaining, ‘I can in fact wish ‘not to see’ a certain aspect of my being only if I am acquainted with the aspect which I do not wish to see.’ And ‘...this means that in my being I must indicate this aspect in order to be able to turn myself away from it...’⁶⁸ In other words, in order that I evade true awareness of my possibilities I must at the same time bring to awareness those possibilities as the very thing I’m trying to evade. And this is precisely the problem of efficacy that we alluded to. For if awareness of angst must ‘...be given in the unity of the same consciousness’⁶⁹ as the evasion, then it is unclear how we can ever successfully *be convinced* by this disguise. In short, it is unclear how the methods of evasion, given their inherent nature, can ever truly be successful. And, as such, it is for this reason that we must now turn to this issue if we wish properly to show how our account of angst, and hence of man *as* perversion of world, is plausible.

⁶⁷ BN, p35

⁶⁸ BN, p35

⁶⁹ Ibid

[ii] Patterns of Bad Faith: the Coquette

Yet how, continuing, are we to do this? How are we to address this problem of how angst-evasion, which exists in phenomenological reality, can nonetheless be rendered theoretically intelligible? Well, according to Sartre, we can do so by exploring the phenomenon of ‘bad faith.’ For *bad faith*, which is the ‘attitude’⁷⁰ that allows us to maintain a lie to ourselves, holds the key to understanding how our methods of evading angst can be ultimately effective. That is, bad faith is the underlying condition for *all* self-deception, and hence it is this which will allow us to comprehend the efficacy of the specific self-evasion involving angst.⁷¹ Yet how in turn are we to comprehend such a fundamental phenomenon? Again, as we might expect, Sartre’s analysis on this point proceeds from concrete phenomenological description. As he says, ‘If we wish to get out of this difficulty, we should examine more closely the patterns of bad faith and attempt a description of them. This description will permit us perhaps to fix more exactly the conditions for the possibility of bad faith.’⁷² In other words, Sartre will take as his starting point for the elucidation of bad faith a concrete case where bad faith can clearly be said to occur. And the particular case he here has in mind, and seeks to describe, is that of the coquette.

Before though we look more closely at the nature of, as Stevenson puts it, that ‘charming little cafe scene’⁷³ involving her, it is necessary to clarify the status of this example and why Sartre chooses it. For to explain, if as we have seen bad faith is already necessarily present in both modes of angst evasion, then we may wonder why he does not simply continue using one of these examples to elucidate it. The answer we will suggest must be for reasons of clarity. That is to say, Sartre chooses an instance of bad faith which is not directly associated with angst evasion because such a mode of bad faith is not ubiquitous in our lives. As such, if he wants to highlight bad faith as a distinctive phenomenon he needs an example which stands out more clearly in relation to ordinary life, and which is not obscured by its ubiquity. And this different kind of example is allowed for because of the fact that whilst all

⁷⁰ BN, p44

⁷¹ In this respect the purpose we assign to bad faith differs from that given in much of the secondary literature, where it is often divorced from a discussion of angst-evasion. Feldman and Hazlett, D. Feldman and A. Hazlett, ‘What’s Bad About Bad Faith’ *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 21, No. 1 [2010]: 50-73, are typical in this respect. For they claim that the purpose of bad faith for Sartre is simply to describe and critique a certain ethical notion of inauthenticity [p51]. And further, in this way they claim that ‘bad faith does not require that one accept any obscure metaphysical view [for example the ontology of *Being and Nothingness*.]’ [p62]. Likewise, Webber in ‘Bad Faith and the Other’ interprets bad faith as an ethical and ‘cultural’ problem rather than as an ontological one [p180-181].

⁷² BN, p55

⁷³ L. Stevenson, ‘Sartre on Bad faith’ *Philosophy*, Vol. 58, No. 224 [1983]: 253-258, p256

angst evasion involves bad faith, not all bad faith need directly involve the evasion of angst. In other words, against Morris, for whom bad faith is always necessarily ‘motivated’ by anguish,⁷⁴ we can say there is an ‘ontic’, or contingent, bad faith. In brief, there is a mode of bad faith which is independent of our more fundamental modes of self-evasion. And it is this ‘ontic’ bad faith which then for the purposes of clarity Sartre takes as the starting thread in his discussion.⁷⁵

So, to return then, what is the nature of this ontic instance of bad faith Sartre has decided to highlight? Well, as already mentioned, it concerns a coquette in a cafe, ‘who has consented to go out with a particular man for the first time.’⁷⁶ And the general context in which she falls into bad faith, or rather what motivates bad faith here, is that there as Sartre says ‘she does not quite know what she wants.’⁷⁷ That is to say, she is aware of her companion’s sexual interest in her and of the decision she will be compelled to make regarding it but, because of her ambivalence, she wants to pretend that nothing here is being asked of her.⁷⁸ How is this accomplished? The answer, first of all, is that she suppresses the temporal, transcendent, aspect implicit in the situation. What this means is that she ignores the way in which the man’s conduct towards her is leading up towards what Sartre calls ‘the first approach’⁷⁹, the initiation of physical intimacy. And she achieves this by making totally immanent those aspects of his behaviour which allude to possibilities beyond their immediate signification. As Sartre says then ‘She restricts this behaviour to what is in the present; she does not wish to read in the phrases which he addresses to her anything other than their explicit meaning.’⁸⁰ So, for instance, when he says to her ‘you have beautiful hair’ she interprets this as just referring to a statement of fact and as well to the man’s character. She

⁷⁴ See Morris, p81: ‘...bad faith is not bad faith unless it is motivated. What motivates it is, according to Sartre, ‘anguish’ in the face of our freedom.’

⁷⁵ Another possible reason for using ontic cases of bad faith could be that they are easier to describe. In contrast, since world absorption and evasion on the reflective level are ‘fundamental’ modes of self-evasion they are also typically obscured from view.

⁷⁶ BN, p55

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Webber, in ‘Bad Faith and the Other’, is correct to challenge the feminist claim that this example is a ‘patriarchal fantasy’ [Moi 1994: 127-33; Doeuff 1991: 72-3.], see Webber, p181. For as Webber points out, people in general, not just the coquette, are seen by Sartre as being in bad faith. That is, like the claim that Sartre’s waiter example is ‘unfair to waiters’ [Ibid], see Phillips, D.Z Phillips, ‘Bad Faith and Sartre’s Waiter’ *Philosophy*, Vol. 56, No. 215 [1981]: 23-31, such criticism misinterprets Sartre on this point. For, it misinterprets him as ‘singling out’ these characters, when they are in fact merely examples of more general human patterns of bad faith. More importantly, further, such criticisms stem from interpreting bad faith in an essentially ‘ethical’ way which covers over the ontological significance of the phenomenon.

⁷⁹ BN, p55

⁸⁰ Ibid

interprets him and his comments as just being 'charming'; and that this 'charm', existing as a fixed being, will persist unchanged into the future.

Thus in this way the woman disarms the situation of its worrying, transcendent, aspect and evades the decision which this transcendence implies. Yet, at the same time she does not want to deny the sexual element in the situation altogether. As Sartre says, 'she would find no charm in a respect which would be only respect'⁸¹ and it is this that distinguishes her as a coquette. For whilst 'desire cruel and naked would humiliate and horrify her'⁸², she at the same time enjoys the excitement which his desire and the concomitant sense of sexual possibility lends to the scene. Consequently the coquette again engages in a move with which to maintain these contradictory wishes. As Sartre says, explaining, 'This time then she refuses to apprehend the desire for what it is; she does not even give it a name; she recognises it only to the extent that it transcends itself toward admiration, esteem, respect.'⁸³ In other words, her response now is the inverse of what it was in relation to the transcendent possibilities latent in the man's conduct. That is to say, just as there the coquette stripped his conduct of all transcendence, at this moment she strips his desire of all immanence. For what she does then, in relation to this desire, is to transform it into a pure transcendent, purging it of its bodily aspect, and seeing in it only a lofty 'concern' for her. And in this fashion therefore she succeeds in enjoying the 'excitement' and tension of the moment whilst avoiding the brute fact of sexuality and the choice it necessitates.

Nevertheless, in Sartre's example, her artful dancing around the situation in this way and the choice it demands of her does not end there. For, 'suppose he takes her hand.'⁸⁴ Such an action, we can say, now threatens her carefully constructed evasions because it seems to demand an immediate choice on her part. In other words, if she leaves her hand there she is implicitly consenting to his advance. Conversely though, if she removes it as Sartre says, she would 'break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm.'⁸⁵ Consequently in her bid to both postpone a decision, and to maintain the *élan* of the moment constituted by sexual possibility, she engages in a final procedure of evasion. What is this? Well, as Sartre describes it, 'the young woman leaves her hand there, but she *does not notice* that she is leaving it.'⁸⁶ And she achieves this by applying to her own being a similar strategy that she used for the man's desire. That is to say, she strips her being of all immanence and

⁸¹ *BN*, p55

⁸² *Ibid*

⁸³ *Ibid*

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

⁸⁵ *Ibid*

⁸⁶ *BN*, p55-56

imagines she is pure transcendence. Engaging in lofty ‘sentimental speculation’⁸⁷ about the nature of life, she enacts a separation from her body and discloses herself as being, essentially, only a consciousness. Thus, continuing, by doing this she abdicates responsibility for her hand. That is, the hand, now not being *truly part of her*, becomes merely a passive object in relation to which the man’s touch can carry no significance.

Concluding then, the coquette succeeds here, in addition to the other two devices, in evading the decision which the situation seemed to demand of her. In this way, she succeeds in both enjoying the peculiar tension the man’s desire lends to the scene whilst at the same avoiding confronting that desire and the choice it implies. And Sartre says, as such ‘We shall say that this woman is in bad faith.’⁸⁸ But why to clarify, we can ask, is this the case? And what, to return to the general concern of our discussion, has been gleaned about the nature of this phenomenon from such an example? To take the former question first, we can say that the woman is in *bad faith* because she hides from herself something at the very moment that she brings it to attention. This is something we witnessed occurring with the evasion of angst. So for instance, in the case of the man’s conduct, she reduces it to being only its immanent meaning precisely because she is aware of its threatening transcendence. That is, she reduces the intimation of future physical contact in his conduct to a purely immediate meaning precisely because she is aware of what his behaviour signifies. Likewise, it is because when the man touches her hand, as Sartre says, she senses ‘profoundly the presence of her own body...’ that ‘...she realizes herself as *not being* her own body.’⁸⁹ In short, the woman is in bad faith because she not only attempts to deceive herself, but because she does so at the very moment that awareness of that thing to be avoided seems unavoidable. And if, as Desan has observed in this fashion, therefore ‘bad faith is the art of retaining together an idea and its negation’⁹⁰, then hers is a paradigmatic case.

However, we may now wonder, to look at our second question, whether we have thereby made any progress in understanding how such self-deception is intelligible. That is to say, if a description of this ontic bad faith was supposed to show how angst evasion could *succeed*, are we not still left with our central problem? In short, are we not still left with the, albeit re-stated, problem of how such a contradictory state of self-evading consciousness can be maintained? Well, in one sense ‘yes’, in so far as this description has not in itself yielded

⁸⁷ BN, p56

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Desan, p24. However Desan misinterprets the specific example of the coquette by saying that it is about the fact that ‘her partner desires more than her love.’ [Ibid]

all the necessary answers. However, in another sense, we can also say we have made some progress. Since, considered properly, this phenomenological description has pointed the way to a possible answer to our problem. And that which we can take up as a guiding thread, towards an answer, from this example is the nature and relation of facticity and transcendence.⁹¹ For, as Sartre says, ‘The basic concept which is thus engendered, utilizes the double property of the human being, who is at once a *facticity* and a *transcendence*.’⁹² What this means then, to begin with, is that the woman somehow succeeds in her self-deception, as we have seen, because she is able to exploit something about the facticity-transcendence relation. To explain, she is able to deny the nature of the situation just as she is profoundly aware of it, because she can exploit the fact that man is *neither* in his entirety facticity nor transcendence. So, for example, her strategy of separating herself from her body, when her hand is touched, works because in one sense it is true that she *is not* her body in so far as human reality always transcends its facticity. Conversely, she succeeds in denying the temporal, transcendent, aspect of the man’s behaviour because it is also true that man’s conduct, in a sense, is what it is. That is, it is true that in one sense we are *not* our future, transcendent, possibilities.

As such then, the aspect of the transcendence-facticity relation which she is able to exploit is that man, as Sartre argues ‘*is not* what he is, and *is* what he is not.’⁹³ If man were straightforwardly self-identical, and just *was* either his body or a disembodied transcendental consciousness, such strategies of self-evasion would not be possible. And in this way then, we can say, it is what Sartre calls man’s ‘double property’ and his non-coincidence with himself which must serve as the guiding thread in understanding bad faith. But then where do we go in terms of exploring this aspect of man in relation to bad faith? Further, where do we thus go in terms of truly grasping how such strategies of radical self-evasion can work? Sartre says now that ‘A quick examination of the idea of sincerity, the antithesis of bad faith will be very instructive in this connection.’⁹⁴ Why sincerity? Well sincerity, which is the ideal that ‘a man be *for himself* only what he *is*’⁹⁵ in some ways seems essentially related to the relationship between bad faith and man’s non-being. As such although the ‘concept of

⁹¹ Stevenson attempts in contrast to understand bad faith in terms of Sartre’s reflective- pre-reflective distinction, p256-257. This effort is then criticised by M. Hymers, ‘Bad Faith’ *Philosophy*, Vol. 64, No. 249 [1989]: 397-402.

⁹² *BN*, p56

⁹³ *BN*, p67, p63, p58

⁹⁴ *BN*, p58

⁹⁵ *Ibid*

transcendence-factcity’⁹⁶ and our coquette example discloses something about man’s non-self-identity, it remains only a particular mode of this. In short, being only a particular mode of this relation it cannot disclose its whole truth. And this means that if we want to explore this more fundamental relation of man’s non self-identity to bad faith, we have to look beyond that specific case to the more universal aspiration of sincerity.

[iii] Sincerity, the waiter, and the impossible ideal

So then, to continue our exploration of bad faith we have to look more closely at the nature of man’s non self-identity, his ‘not being what he is’, and to do this we will look at the general project of sincerity. How in turn are we to do this? Well, Sartre begins by noting that sincerity is ‘not merely an ideal of knowing but an ideal of *being*.’⁹⁷ In other words, sincerity is not, as we are sometimes inclined to think, purely a case of what we say or believe but a pursuit; something we actively try to realise in our lives. And it is for this reason again, that Sartre turns to a concrete description of such a pursuit to explore what ‘sincerity’ means in this case. That is, he turns to the famous example of the waiter in the cafe. For such a waiter is evidently trying to ‘become what he is.’ As Sartre indicates,

His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tight rope-walker by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium which he perpetually re-establishes by a light movement of the arm and hand. [BN, p59]

In different words then, the waiter is attempting a project of sincerity. As Sartre says, ‘he is playing at *being* a waiter in a cafe’, and he ‘plays with his condition in order to *realize* it.’⁹⁸ Occupying nominally the position of a waiter, he is acting in such a way as to somehow

⁹⁶ BN, p57

⁹⁷ BN, p59

⁹⁸ Ibid

make this constitute what he *is* in a more fundamental sense.⁹⁹ But what exactly is the nature of this attempt to *be* a waiter in this way? And what does it reveal about man's non-being and his sincerity? We can begin by saying that the waiter's attempted 'sincerity', his efforts to coincide with the being of a waiter, does not mean he seeks to make of himself in a straightforward sense a thing in-itself. That is, he does not seek to make himself exist literally like an object or automaton.

As such then, we reject the claim of Hartmann, inferred here, that 'Sincerity is simply the project of making my whole self an in-itself.'¹⁰⁰ For, to attempt to *be* a waiter here does not mean, as Phillips also suggests, 'To say 'My life is to wait at table.'¹⁰¹ In other words, even at the moment I am involved in this 'act', to make this effort does not mean attempting to believe I am 'nothing other' than this waiter. It does not mean to subsume my entire existence in that role. Indeed, attempting to be this waiter I could still also be aware, for example, of my existence as a husband, father, or an aspiring actor, or even of my time off afterwards. Likewise, my efforts to live up to a certain role do not, as McCulloch argues, 'represent attempts to become absorbed in the role, and so to enjoy a thing-like, choiceless existence.'¹⁰² This is because, in employing the 'dance' of the waiter, I do not thereby assert that I am determined solely to be a waiter, or that this is all that I could ever do. In fact, even in attempting to *be* a waiter we could still be aware of a potential future choice to change profession.

So then, what does the waiter's attempt to *be* a waiter mean? That is, what does it mean if we reject these possibilities, which centre on him becoming simplistically a thing in-itself? Well, we can begin to answer this question by observing that although this is a particularly explicit case of the project of sincerity it is by no means exceptional. In other words, not only, as Phillips has observed, is the behaviour Sartre describes the norm amongst waiters,¹⁰³ but, as Sartre says, 'This obligation is not different from that which is imposed on all tradesmen.'¹⁰⁴ And what this means is that we begin to understand the waiter in terms of a more ubiquitous, if unacknowledged, phenomenon. For, what we find in all these cases and in

⁹⁹ See D. Cumming, 'Role Playing: Sartre's Transformation of Husserl's phenomenology' in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, ed. C. Howells [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992] for a discussion of the nature of role playing in Sartre's philosophy as a whole, especially as it is connected to the imagination and Sartre's movement away from Husserl. However, it should be noted, his discussion of bad faith and role playing is not grounded in Sartre's ontology and his discussion of non-being. [p47-48]

¹⁰⁰ Hartmann, p56

¹⁰¹ D.Z Phillips, p27, *Philosophy*: 'To say 'My life is to wait at table' would be an extreme form of bad faith.'

¹⁰² McCulloch, p58

¹⁰³ Phillips, p27, p24-25

¹⁰⁴ *BN*, p59

all jobs is a more subtle effort which is simply about ‘being’ that thing in a more familiar and everyday sense. And what we mean here is indicated by Sartre when he says, regarding the waiter, that ‘He knows well what it ‘means:’ the obligation of getting up at five o’clock, of sweeping the floor of the shop before the restaurant opens, of starting the coffee pot going *etc.*’¹⁰⁵ In different words then, it is not that the waiter is enacting some elaborate deceit or ‘act’ in his efforts here. Rather, he does indeed perform all these duties, and exists as a waiter in an ordinary human way, which takes up part of his life. That is to say, he seeks to *be* a waiter in the same way that I might say ordinarily ‘I am a student’, or ‘I am a teacher.’ And as such therefore, the waiter’s attempt to *be* a waiter is just a variation of what we all do. In short, what the waiter is doing here is a variation of what we all do when we believe a particular role somehow gives content to, or is a ‘real’ part of, our lives.

Yet, the critical point is that it is precisely *this* everyday sense of ‘being’ which necessarily eludes us. For, as Sartre argues, such being is only ever a form or ‘ideal’ perpetually escaping our grasp. As he says then, ‘It is a “representation” for others and for myself, which means that I can be he only in *representation*.’¹⁰⁶ In other words, there is some kind of real or ‘solid’ life of a waiter which I can never quite be. Like the waiter in Sartre’s example I can make more of an effort to adopt that role, to ‘represent’ that being, but I thereby just confirm that this is precisely what I am not. Further, this non-being is not just a void or empty abstraction. For as Sartre says, ‘there is no doubt that I *am* in a sense a cafe waiter - otherwise could I not just as well call myself a diplomat or reporter?’¹⁰⁷ And in this way we can say that my non-being is defined precisely by a certain reality and ‘closeness’ of that ideal. It is like, we can say, a form perpetually on the periphery of my vision. That is to say, it is something I feel like I am always *almost* apprehending and touching, but which nonetheless always just succeeds in evading my gaze.

Moreover, as Sartre points out here, ‘we are dealing with more than mere social positions; I am never any one of my attitudes, any one of my actions.’¹⁰⁸ In different words, what we are absent from in this way is not merely the ‘ideals’ of particular public roles or positions. What we are absent from is instead everything which can be said to give substance to our lives. As Sartre says then, ‘Perpetually absent to my body, to my acts, I am despite myself that ‘divine absence’ of which Valéry speaks.’¹⁰⁹ And our body acts as a particularly

¹⁰⁵ BN, p59-60

¹⁰⁶ BN, p60

¹⁰⁷ Ibid

¹⁰⁸ BN, p60

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

relevant example of the point here. For, as a phenomenological account of the body reveals, we can never actually fully grasp the character of our own physical appearance.¹¹⁰ Even though I ought to be better acquainted with this than anyone, and might spend hours each day in the mirror, what I actually look like, for myself, can never quite be fixed. Likewise, in another example, Sartre argues this strange absence from the ‘ideal’ of being applies to our emotions. As he says, citing melancholy here, ‘sadness perpetually haunts my consciousness [of] being sad, but it as a value which I cannot realize; it stands as a regulative meaning of my sadness...’¹¹¹ In other words, as we saw with the waiter, it is not a case of saying that in a straightforward sense I am not sad. My sadness is on one level real, and I feel it, as opposed to feeling happy or bored, and it ‘haunts my consciousness.’ However, as with the ‘ideal’ of the waiter, my sadness is something which nonetheless is always just outside my grasp. Like my sense of joy or regret it is something, that is, which I can never *really* feel in myself; something which always seems to be given under the auspices of a certain pretence.

[iv] The impossibility of the ideal applied to belief: a solution

But to return, where does all this leave our discussion of sincerity and man’s non-being? Well, we can say that an elaboration of the former from the example of the waiter’s attempted sincerity, has shown that sincerity is ‘...a task impossible to achieve, of which the very meaning is in contradiction with the structure of my consciousness.’¹¹² In different words then, and against McCulloch who argues sincerity is possible in certain cases,¹¹³ the attempt to be what one *is* is universally impossible. And further, we can say, this impossibility is part of the structure of our being. As Sartre states, ‘this impossibility is not hidden from consciousness; on the contrary, it is the very stuff of consciousness; it is the embarrassing constraint which we constantly experience; it is our incapacity to recognise ourselves, to constitute ourselves as being what we are.’¹¹⁴ Consequently, we can say that an investigation of sincerity has disclosed, in a new way, the nature of man’s ‘non-being’. That is, it has revealed the nature of that phenomenon to which our first concrete example of the coquette had led us. For, against Stevenson, who argues that such a characterisation of man is

¹¹⁰ See *BN*, Part III, Chapter 2, ‘The body’

¹¹¹ *BN*, p61

¹¹² *BN*, p62

¹¹³ McCulloch, p62: he argues both that sincerity is possible and that sincerity is not in bad faith.

¹¹⁴ *BN*, p62

meaningless,¹¹⁵ sincerity has revealed man's strange absence from himself as fundamentally linked to his most basic project. In short, we can see that an impossible attempt to be what we are not, in trying to coincide with the elusive 'ideals' of our being, is what characterises the very effort of our existence.

Yet continuing, if this 'incapacity to recognise ourselves' has been revealed, where in turn does this leave our discussion of bad faith? Where does this leave our attempt to understand how a contradictory state of self-deceiving consciousness can be maintained and thus how angst evasion can succeed? The answer is that it provides a crucial part of a solution to our problem. For if consciousness, as seen with sincerity, is characterised by a continual failure entirely to coincide with an ideal of being then this must too apply to *belief*. In short, our beliefs, and our ability to believe, must be afflicted with this failure, 'the divine absence', inherent in our entire existence. And this is what Sartre describes in his final section on bad faith.¹¹⁶ For, as he says there, 'Every belief is a belief that falls short; one never wholly believes what one believes.'¹¹⁷ In other words, when we consider closely our belief we realise there is an absence at its heart. We realise, when we consider this carefully enough, that I cannot be genuinely sincere about any of my beliefs. For we realise that behind even the most 'heart felt' belief is a failure or a strange incongruity. And, as such, belief in this way resembles every other aspect of our existence. That is, we can imagine ourselves 'believing' in the manner that a character in a novel or another person might, but fundamentally we sense that such belief does not really apply to us.

However returning to our argument, this last conclusion about the illusive nature of belief helps to address our problem only when combined with another point. And this point, which will get us to the heart of bad faith, is that we are *necessarily aware* of this failure of belief. That is, as Sartre says, 'To believe is to know that one believes, and to know that one believes is no longer to believe.'¹¹⁸ Just as, then, the impossibility of sincerity in general 'is the very stuff of consciousness'¹¹⁹, so too is this failure of belief something of which we are always implicitly aware. And the reason why these two points combined help us here goes back to our example of the coquette. In particular, the reason they direct us to a solution goes back to a 'strategy' we saw adopted by her to disguise awareness of her body from herself.

¹¹⁵ Stevenson claims that the idea of 'man being what he is not' is unintelligible, p253. Similarly Phillips criticises Sartre's idea of man as non-being, saying that, 'From the fact that I am not simply in one action or attitude, it does not follow that I am not in that action or attitude at all', p30.

¹¹⁶ *BN*, Chapter 2, III: The 'Faith' of Bad Faith.

¹¹⁷ *BN*, p69

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹¹⁹ *BN*, p62

For just as there she did this by ‘playing’ with awareness of the two different kinds of non-being, we see the same ‘game’ at play with regards to the two different senses of belief. This is because, as Sartre explains,

Every belief is a belief that falls short; one never wholly believes what one believes. Consequently the primitive project of bad faith is only the utilization of this self-destruction of the fact of consciousness. If every belief in good faith is an impossible belief, then there is a place for every impossible belief. My inability to *believe* that I am courageous will not discourage me since every belief involves not quite believing. I shall define this impossible belief as *my* belief. [BN, Chapter 2, p69]

In other words, to start, what we have as with the coquette is two different senses of ‘non-belief’, or ‘impossible belief.’ First of all then there is the ordinary sense of impossible belief, something I know in the more mundane sense not to be the case. That is, there is that sense of non-belief applying to *particular* beliefs such as ‘I am courageous.’ Then there is the second sense of ‘impossibility’. This is the sense of non-belief which we have just revealed in our discussion, referring to *all* belief, and the impossibility of ever truly believing anything. And what the consciousness of bad faith does, given its implicit awareness of this second mode of ‘non-belief’, is to conflate the two senses. That is to say, it uses the impossibility of belief in the second, ‘ontological’ sense to dismiss as impossible *both* kinds of belief. As Sartre says, ‘It has disarmed all beliefs in advance- those which it would like to take hold of and, by the same stroke, the others, those which it wishes to flee. In *willing* this self-destruction of belief...it ruins the beliefs which are opposed to it, which reveal themselves as *being only* belief.’¹²⁰ What it does then is to destroy all beliefs in the first, ‘mundane’ sense by viewing them all in the mode of ‘ontological’ belief. All *particular* beliefs thus now are impossible. However then, having destroyed ordinary belief by seeing it in terms of ‘ontological’ belief it now moves back to the mundane mode. That is, it now wants to re-instate the truth of whichever beliefs it chooses in the ordinary sense, since all such ordinary belief has now been reduced to the same level.

Like the born-again Christian’s sin then, the belief of bad faith reduces all belief to nought, so that it can resurrect, with awareness of the futility of all belief, whatever it

¹²⁰ BN, p70

chooses. Bad faith thus exploits the fact that we already *essentially* feel ourselves playing a game ‘of mirror and reflection’¹²¹ regarding belief, in order to believe what is convenient. And in this way we can understand how the impossibility of genuine belief, and our implicit awareness of this, allows for bad faith. For if we sense that all belief somehow ‘falls short’ then my adoption of a contradictory belief can be maintained. That is, if we sense somehow that all belief is a ‘game’ anyway I can believe even that which appears impossible. And furthermore it does not matter that this ‘strategy’ of sliding between the two senses of belief is itself in bad faith. In short, it does not matter, as Sartre says, that ‘I shall not be able to hide from myself that I believe in order not to believe and that I do not believe *in order to* believe.’¹²² Or put another way, it matters not that an assertion of belief, my *actually* believing in a contradictory idea, is justified precisely by first saying that *nothing* can be believed or asserted. For, as Sartre makes clear, bad faith is in bad faith right down to its very roots. As he says, ‘bad faith must be itself in bad faith.’¹²³ And there is then no underlying ‘reason’ therefore to be appealed to; our refusal to be honest in our non-belief runs to the very core of our being.

D. Conclusion: *angst-evasion and non-humanist existentialism*

To conclude therefore, it is apparent how with this we have now solved the problem with which we began this section. For we began by saying that we had to show not only that angst evasion *in fact* existed, but how it was itself theoretically explicable. In other words, fully to address the problem of the rarity of angst we had to show how the methods of angst evasion described could possibly be successful. And this was a problem we said because of the nature of any form of self-evasion. For if, as Sartre says, to evade something ‘I must aim at the object of my flight in order to flee it’¹²⁴, it is unclear how any form of self-evasion could be successful. This is because if to disguise angst I must at that moment be aware of angst in order to disguise it, it is unclear how the strategies of angst-evasion described could ever ultimately be effective.¹²⁵ And we began to address this problem thus by looking at what

¹²¹ BN, p66

¹²² BN, p69-70

¹²³ BN, p68

¹²⁴ BN, p43

¹²⁵ Thus Catalano’s attempt, in ‘Successfully Lying to oneself’ p681, to explain self-deception by utilising the temporal divide between reflective and pre-reflective awareness is not applicable here. For, whilst this explains a mode of self-misrepresentation, reflective misrepresentations of pre-reflective experience, it does not address

Sartre calls ‘bad faith’, the underlying condition for all modes of self-deception. As such, we first attempted to understand this phenomenon by giving a description of a concrete instance of bad faith, not associated with angst evasion. That is, we gave a phenomenological account of the woman in the cafe. And continuing there we saw that it was ‘the double property of the human being’¹²⁶, the fact man both is and *is not* his facticity and transcendence, that allowed her to deceive herself about the true nature of the situation and the choice she faced. In short, we saw that it was something about man’s non-identity with himself that allowed bad faith to take place.

Continuing therefore, assuming that ‘non-identity’ might hold the key to bad faith, we followed Sartre’s suggestion that ‘examination of the idea of sincerity, the antithesis of bad faith, will be very instructive in this connection.’¹²⁷ That is, to explore bad faith further we looked at sincerity as the paradigm of man’s attempt to deny his non-identity and achieve identity with himself. And further we looked at another concrete example in order to understand this next, more universal, phenomenon. In other words, we looked at the example of the waiter who was ‘playing at *being* a waiter in a cafe.’¹²⁸ However we disagreed with the familiar interpretations of what the waiter’s attempt to *be* a waiter represented. That is to say, we disagreed with the idea that he was trying simplistically to become an object or a ‘thing in-itself.’ Instead we argued, what the waiter was trying to live up to was a more everyday sense or ‘ideal’ of being that human beings have in relation to all aspects of their lives. And it is this which the waiter could never quite be. Furthermore finally, we said that it was this non-identity, ‘...our incapacity to recognise ourselves, to constitute ourselves as being what we are’¹²⁹ which in turn allowed us to understand the nature of bad faith. For this sense of man as a ‘divine absence’, of not *truly* ever being able to realise an ideal of being, must apply to belief as well. In other words, we can never *quite* believe, and hence, as Sartre says, ‘Every belief is a belief that falls short.’¹³⁰ And this last point, as we have seen, provides a solution to the initial problem of self-deception posed. For by conflating the impossibility of belief in an ontological sense with impossibility of belief in an ordinary sense, it can maintain bad faith. In short, by applying the former mode of impossibility to the latter it can destroy all ordinary belief, and then resurrect in a mode of pseudo-belief whatever it wishes.

Sartre’s problem here. This is because angst-evasion refers to a self-deception whose processes all occur *in the same moment*, without any temporal division between the awareness of the object and the ‘lie’.

¹²⁶ BN, p56

¹²⁷ BN, p58

¹²⁸ BN, p59

¹²⁹ Ibid

¹³⁰ BN, p69

However, where does this leave our argument as a whole? Where does this point about the impossibility of belief leave our claims regarding the plausibility of a non-humanist *phenomenological* existentialism? Well, we can begin to answer this firstly by saying that it is through this that we have been able to show how a form of radical self-deception is possible. That is, by exploring bad faith we have shown how strategies are possible through which we can deceive ourselves about something of which we are at that moment aware. And this is significant because we have thereby shown how a central problem with angst-evasion is resolved. For if we have shown how we can be *convinced* by a deception of which we are, in one sense, always necessarily aware then it is apparent how we might evade awareness of our very being. In other words, with this it is apparent how we can evade angst even though, as Sartre says, ‘we are angst’¹³¹ and must be constantly aware of this. Continuing moreover, this in turn is significant because resolving this problem then allows us to explain ‘the rarity of the phenomenon of anguish.’¹³² Put differently, it allows us to explain fully why, despite representing the necessary consciousness of my being, it is so rarely in fact actually experienced. In short, with our account of bad faith we have resolved one of the central problems with Sartre’s description of angst. For now we have shown fully that the rarity of this phenomenon is accounted for by our systematic evasion of angst. And this is because we have shown now not only that pervasive forms of angst-evasion exist but how they can be successful. That is, we have shown not only that systematic angst-evasion *in fact* has a basis in phenomenological reality but that it can be rendered theoretically intelligible.

Yet to conclude, how does this then pertain to our wider discussion? For if we have with our explanation of angst-evasion resolved the problem of angst’s rarity, how does this impact upon our discussion of non-humanist existentialism? The answer is that it does so because it renders our initial account of angst more plausible. That is, resolving one of the central problems with angst it renders our account of this phenomenon both more concrete and intelligible. And this is critical because of the role angst plays in our overall argument. For angst was necessary, we said, to explain how we could make sense of our pre-reflective intuition of man *as* relation, and hence not as subject entity. In different words, angst was required to explain how this non-humanist conception, explained *as* the perverse modification of world, could be manifest in experience. And angst filled this role because it allowed for the realisation that, as Gardner puts it, ‘responsibility for *the* world derives from my

¹³¹ BN, p43

¹³² BN, p35

responsibility for *my* world.’¹³³ In brief, framed in our terms, it allowed for the apprehension of my being *as* the perverse dissonance my possibilities bring to the surface of the world. And thus continuing it is clear how with our present chapter we have now answered the central question of our discussion. That is, it is clear how by explaining the nature of our systematic evasion of this state and its disclosure that we make a non-humanist phenomenological conception of man more compelling. This is because we have not only indicated why we are so rarely given a glimpse of our true being but because we have brought this account back to the actuality of man’s existence. That is, regarding our enquiry, we have ‘immersed man back in the world.’¹³⁴ For by explaining with angst-evasion the most familiar mode of concrete existence, we have rooted Sartre’s non-humanist conception back in our world, and thus given to it new sense.

¹³³ Gardner, p166

¹³⁴ *TE*, p51

Conclusion: *Ontology and Ethics*

So where does this leave us then? Where does the discussion in our last chapter of angst evasion leave our project overall? To address these questions let us first recall what was accomplished there. For we can start by noting that we showed successfully how man evades anguish. That is, we demonstrated that man for the most part avoids anguished awareness of his true being because of the ‘absorbing’ structures of the everyday world. And further, we added, this apparently paradoxical evasion of one’s self, was rendered possible by bad faith. In short, it was rendered possible by man utilising the very non-being he is trying to escape, so as to believe that which is impossible. Consequently continuing, we saw how with this we addressed the localised problem of that chapter. This is because in showing how man systematically evaded angst we also made our initial account of non-humanist *phenomenological* existentialism more intelligible. That is, we revealed the meaning of our formulation of man *as* perverting relation, in conscious awareness with angst, and in the most general mode of our existence. For we saw there with the account of angst-evasion that man is defined in that state, not merely by not-being-what-he-is but by ‘not-being-what-one-is-not.’¹ In other words, we saw that in the generality of concrete existence man is distinguished *as* the perverse flight from that initial perversion which constitutes his being. And it was in this respect that we answered the question underpinning our previous chapter.

This is for the reason that we thus demonstrated with this how a *phenomenological* existentialism not wedded to a humanist subject could be made compelling. And in thus doing this we showed thereby how existentialism as a whole, not merely Nietzsche’s version of it, could escape humanism’s substantial subject-entity. That is, we showed that a non-humanist conception of man might be possible for all modes of existential thought. However, does this then mean we satisfied all the goals with which our project set out? In other words, have we now shown not simply that existentialism is compatible with a rejection of humanism, but that its essential spirit is *defined* by that rejection? Put another way, have we shown that the meaning of existentialism is disclosed precisely *as* the true overcoming of the humanist paradigm? In one sense the answer is ‘yes’. And this can be demonstrated if we look back to our introduction, and what we said there was the most basic meaning of existentialism. For, we said there that given in its most simple form, existential thought can

¹ J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by H. Barnes [London: Routledge, 1958], p70

be defined by the sense that, as Sartre says, ‘what man needs is to rediscover himself.’² In other words, existentialism represents, we said, a desire to move away from ‘man’ as an object of knowledge, and recover his meaning on a more primordial level. That is, it represents the desire to recover his meaning on the level of what is given in lived existence, prior to theoretical assumptions about what this meaning must be. And further we saw that this ‘return to man’ was what unified the different modes of thought that can be labelled existentialist. This is because in both Nietzsche and Sartre we find the same underlying project. In short, whether expressed through more narrow and precise phenomenological means, or the richer but less rigorous terms of historic-cultural critique, both sought a recovery of what by existing man is actually experienced.

Moreover, to continue, we saw in the course of our discussion that pursued properly this project necessarily escapes humanism. This is because we saw that when we, as Heidegger says, climb ‘back down into the nearness of the nearest’³, we find there is no substantial self disclosed there. Rather, in truly returning to man’s existence as it is given, and unfolding the implications of what is found, we uncover instead only a relation to something other than man. That is, we find in Nietzsche that man exists only *as* a relation to prior natural forces, and in Sartre *as* relation to world. Or, as Sartre puts it, that ‘The for-itself has no reality save that of being the nihilation of being.’⁴ And this relation we said could be understood in terms of perversion. For man could be comprehended as having no substance distinct from the world, yet a distinct being, only if he somehow exists *as* a parasitical modification of world. In different words, he could be comprehended *as* relation only if he *is* the perversion of world which necessarily refers to that world in the very act of subverting it. And returning then it is apparent how we have addressed our general question. This is because we have thus seen that a genuine return to man’s existence as actually given must lead away from humanism’s subject-entity. In other words, the basic meaning of existentialism, as return to man, does not just allow for a rejection of humanism, it in fact paradoxically implies it. For the existentialists, as the true ‘adventurers and circumnavigators of that inner world called “man”’⁵, grasp man precisely in opposition to the ‘objective’

² J-P. Sartre, *Existentialism is a humanism*, trans. by C. Macomber [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007], p53

³ M. Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism’, in *Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. by D.F. Krell [London: Routledge, 1978], p173

⁴ *BN*, p618

⁵ F. Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human* trans. by R.J. Hollingdale [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], Preface: SS6

theoretical mode of the humanists. And this necessarily means existentialism does not simply 'locate man within being as one being among others.'⁶

Put another way then, existentialism by its very nature is already a calling into question of man as ontologically equivalent to other beings. That is, it is a calling into question of what is fundamentally the ontological status afforded by humanism to man. For in seeking truly to recover the meaning of man in philosophy, existential thought instead must recover the true ontological *distinctiveness* of his being. In brief, it must recover the true status and significance of man precisely as he is not ultimately just another mode of entity in the world.⁷ And this means that existentialism, defined by this return to man, does not *just happen to be* non-humanist, but is fundamentally defined and distinguished by its opposition to humanism. Yet it still may be claimed that this cannot represent a conclusion to our discussion. For it might be argued that we have reached this point only by neglecting an essential aspect of what we called the 'return to man'. In other words, we have reached this point by ignoring the sense in which a true 'recovery' of man also means a recovery of the vital significance of philosophy *for* man. That is, we have reached this point by ignoring the way in which this return also means showing how philosophy impacts upon the lives of actually existing men.

Continuing, this is in essence the objection that existentialism as outlined here is merely a 'contemplative philosophy.'⁸ For, whilst, it might be said, an interest in 'concrete existence' is professed what we in fact have is ultimately just another *theory* of man. That is, we have in the end as Heidegger puts it 'only a theoretical representation of Being and of man'⁹ with no practical bearing on actual existence. And this is the problem raised when he wonders, 'can we obtain from such knowledge directives that can be readily applied to our active lives?'¹⁰ However, it will be argued in the remainder of our conclusion that we can answer Heidegger's question in the affirmative. In short we can, at least in one sense, respond to the objection that our discussion has no possible influence upon concrete existence. And our basis for doing so goes back to what was said about our last chapter. For we saw both there and in our discussion of morality, that man's being is defined not just by being the perversion of a prior being, but by being a 'secondary perversion' of that. In other words, we

⁶ LH, p154

⁷ See also P. Tillich, *Theology of Culture* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1959], p105-107: Tillich understands existentialism in terms of an opposition to all that in modern culture which has sapped the meaning and significance of man's existence.

⁸ EH, p17. Specifically this was the criticism levelled at Sartre after world war two by the French communists.

⁹ LH, p177

¹⁰ LH, p177

saw that man's concrete being is distinguished in both cases by being a flight from the initial perversion which grounds our being. And it is this 'secondary perversion' then in concrete existence which holds the key to explaining what sort of real imperative emerges from our ontology.

But what is this imperative which is implied there? And why does 'secondary perversion' hold the key to it? The first thing to say here is that we do not simplistically base our claims upon the ordinary pejorative, or what Freud calls, 'accusatory sense'¹¹ of perversion. That is, we do not straightforwardly for our claim appeal to the idea that perversion as a 'non-normal' or 'non-healthy' state is *prima facie* bad. For, as discussed, perversity in the 'primary' sense just is a constituting feature of human life which is therefore impossible to avoid, and absurd to condemn. Rather, following on from this, we criticise secondary perversion on the grounds of, as Sartre puts it, that 'self-recovery we shall call authenticity.'¹² In other words, we criticise that mode of perversity because it represents a denial of our true state precisely *as* perversion. This is because whether in *ressentiment* or in evading angst, we suppress and betray there what on one level we have experienced as the truth of our being. Put differently, what we criticise is that there we are living a consoling 'error'¹³ and lie about ourselves and the world. And, returning to our original point, this means that our analysis of secondary perversion can therefore intimate a possible 'imperative' in our discussion. For secondary perversity it seems is as such something that we *ought* to struggle against.

Yet, it might also be apparent that still this alone is insufficient. That is, it is apparent that we have not then indicated that our interpretation of existentialism has a concrete 'ethical', or transformative, relation to man. This is for the reason that whilst we have said what man then *ought* to overcome it is not immediately clear on our analysis that he *in fact* is able to do so. For haven't we said, especially in our discussion of Sartre, that our evasion of ourselves was rooted in the very structure of the world? In other words, didn't we suggest that, as Nietzsche says, 'we *must* confusedly mistake who we are'¹⁴; that the self-evasion we

¹¹S. Freud, 'Three Essays on Sexual Theory', in *The Psychology of Love*, trans. by S. Whiteside [London: Penguin, 2006], p136

¹² *BN*, p70, FN: 9

¹³ *EH*, p47-48. Sartre's specific claim is that we may object to bad faith because it represents a logical error.

¹⁴ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* trans. by C. Diethe [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994]: Preface: SS1

called secondary perversity is more than a contingent individual or even social problem?¹⁵ We have. However, as Sartre says, ‘that does not mean that we cannot radically escape bad faith.’¹⁶ Put differently, this does not mean we need accept Mulhall’s claim that men’s natures as perverse ‘will distort and ultimately invalidate any efforts they might make by themselves to alter that orientation.’¹⁷ For, as we have also seen, our ordinary absorption in the world can at times be disrupted. In different words, there are exceptional states such as ‘sickness’ and ‘angst’ in which those structures rooting us in self-evasion lose some of their grip. And this suggests that there is always at least the hope that our ‘fallenness’ in the world is not absolute, and that secondary perversion might be challenged.

Put differently then, the fact that self-evasion is structural rather than merely contingent does not mean we are deprived of all capacity to overcome it. And this means in turn that the overcoming of secondary perversion might therefore serve as a meaningful imperative emerging from our discussion. However, that is not to say that such an imperative is not deeply problematic. For if we have thereby suggested how non-humanist existentialism might practically relate to man we have also raised a series of further questions about what form this takes. And these centre on the relation between ordinary world-absorption and the exceptional states which challenge it. That is, they centre on how overcoming can occur when our predominant mode of being necessarily presses everything back toward the inauthentic. For even if some intimations of escape are possible it seems they are always on some level reclaimed by the mode of everydayness. In other words, it seems that an ordinary ethics relying upon the articulation and understanding of a goal is no longer straightforwardly possible. This is because, further, any potential articulation or comprehension of an imperative here must always be compromised by the very inauthenticity it seeks to escape. In short, as Heidegger says, ‘the water which flows backwards towards the source’¹⁸ is always polluted. That is, the Mnemosyne, the very sign which might point toward an authentic recovery of self, is always itself necessarily obscured. And it is thus to address this problem that further research is needed. In brief, it is to grasp the meaning of existential ethics, and

¹⁵ See J. Webber, ‘Bad Faith and Other’, in *Reading Sartre: On phenomenology and existentialism*, ed. J. Webber [London: Routledge, 2011], p180-181, for the idea that bad faith is rooted in our social and cultural circumstances.

¹⁶ *BN*, p70, FN: 9

¹⁷ S. Mulhall, *S. Philosophical Myths of the Fall* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005], p6. This point then leads Mulhall to say that therefore ‘the only possible solution lies in their attaining a certain kind of orientation to the divine’ [Ibid]. In other words, our own perverse nature prevents us from saving ourselves, and as such a God is required to do it.

¹⁸ M. Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* trans. by J. Glenngray [New York: Harper and Row, 1968], p11

hence the full concreteness of non-humanist existentialism, that further exploration of this topic is required.

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